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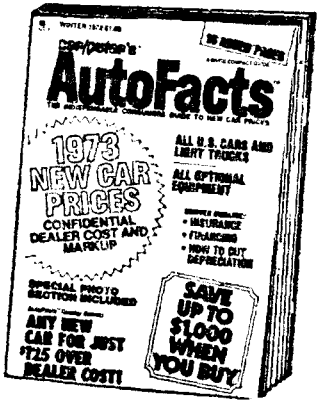

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IT NEVER PAYS TO BE TOO CLEVER

by MICHAEL GILBERT

When Patrick Petrella was a Detective Sergeant on Highside, his days were filled with the unromantic things which fill the days—and occasionally the nights—of policemen in a London division. Youths wrecked telephone booths; girls removed things from shops without going through the formality of paying for them; there was an epidemic of mid-afternoon housebreaking and a very odd series of cat burglaries, apparently the work of a mad amateur.

Only on one occasion was Petrella personally involved in a murder case. Murders were usually handled by the ace performers from Central, who collared all the kudos, and included accounts of them in the reminiscences which they were all planning to write after they retired.

On this particular occasion Petrella got no kudos, and the case is unlikely to feature in his reminiscences.

Because the murder never occurred.

He was walking home, across the Heath, at the end of a long

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day, when he saw the umbrella. It was planted in a clump of bushes in the depression made by a V2 rocket in the last war. If the almost horizontal rays of the sinking sun had not picked out the metal band round the handle he would have missed seeing it.

When he had extracted it, the reason for its abandonment became plain. There were rents in the material, and the inside was smeared with what looked like brick dust and plaster.

The action of extracting the umbrella had parted the bushes and Petrella, peering in, saw something else. Under a pile of leaves, at the bottom of the little hollow, he caught a glimpse of what looked like brown wool or fur. It was a difficult place to get at, but he made it, at some cost to his trousers, and scraped away the leaves.

It was a dog, a young Airedale, quite recently dead. It seemed to have been killed by a sharp instrument driven through its throat. Its brown eyes had in them a look of surprise that humans, whom the dog had learned to trust, should behave in such an inhuman manner.

Superintendent Haxtell had often rebuked his subordinate for over-ingenuity. "Stick to the rule book, lad," he had said. "It never pays to be too clever." And it would, of course, be absurd to suggest that Petrella had, at that point, worked out any logical connection between the two things he had found. Nevertheless, he reburied the dog and took the umbrella home.

The next day, having business at Central, he took down with him a sample of the debris from inside the umbrella. A friend in the Forensic Science Laboratory put it under a microscope and confirmed Petrella's view that part of it was plaster, which had probably come from a ceiling, and part of it were minute chips from old soot-stained roof tiles.

Armed with this information, Petrella showed the umbrella to Superintendent Haxtell.

"You know those cat burglaries," said Petrella.

"Mad," said Haxtell. "Quite mad. No sense in 'em. Some amateur who's been watching too much television."

They did seem like that. The loot had been comparatively trivial: jewelry, silver, and trinkets. And since none of the things had turned up in pawnbrokers' lists, or in other places where they might have been expected to show up, the supposition was that the burglar was hoarding them.

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This was odd enough, but not as odd as his methods of entry.

A self-respecting burglar usually selected one method and stuck to it. In his efforts so far, this man had used five different methods, each more sensational than the last. Second-story windows reached by drainpipe. Attic windows reached from the roof. On one occasion he had even made a hole in the roof and let himself into the house that way.

"If he hadn't been stupid enough to leave his trademark behind," said Haxtell, "we might have thought they were five different people."

The unknown marauder was alert to the danger of finger-prints. It had apparently not occurred to him that footprints could be equally revealing. On each of the five occasions they had found the same mark. It had been made by the rubber sole of a heavy boot or shoe with thick arrow-shaped ridges in the rubber, two of them slashed across the middle by a distinctive sickle-shaped cut.

"It was the roof job I was thinking of," said Petrella. "The accepted technique is to break a few tiles, make a narrow hole, poke an umbrella through, then open it up so that the rest of the plaster and stuff falls *into* the umbrella, making no noise."

"If you ask me," said Haxtell, "he does it on purpose. All that flummery. Much easier to break a window or jimmy a door. He's simply drawing attention to himself."

"That's what I wondered," said Petrella.

Haxtell looked at him suspiciously. "You've been thinking again, lad," he said.

"It was that dog. Airedales are useful guard dogs."

"For crying out loud! If a burglar killed a dog, why would he want to lug it up onto the Heath?"

Petrella could suggest no answer to that. Nevertheless, he walked round to have a word with Mr. Poulter, at the newsstand, who knew everything that happened in High-side.

"Two-year-old Airedale," said Mr. Poulter. "That'll be Miss Manciple's. Lives in Partick Terrace. Big house at the end. Her nephew took the dog out for a walk two nights ago on the Heath and it ran off. Did you say someone stabbed it? Boys, I wooden wonder. If you want my opinion they ought to bring back the birch."

Petrella called next on Miss Manciple. She answered the door, but did not take it off the chain until she had examined his credentials carefully. She was so old that age had ceased

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to have much meaning. Petrella put her at 80, but it could have been 90. The black eyes in her wrinkled parchment face were lively and she walked without a stick.

Petrella noticed that the ground- and second-floor windows were barred. Miss Manciple saw him looking at them and nodded her head. "I've got burglar alarms, too," she said. "*And* a telephone beside my bed. I had a dog until two days ago—"

Petrella told her about the dog.

She said, "Poor Toby. He was a good dog. I'm getting another Airedale. Do you suppose dogs and humans go to the same place when they die? I can't see why not, can you? I've known more nice dogs than nice people in my life."

Petrella said, "How did you come to lose him?"

"It was my great-nephew, Frank Porter. He's a fine lad, officer. My sister's son's boy. He's the only relative I've got left. Very kind to an old woman is Frank."

"How did it happen?"

"He took Toby out on the Heath for a run. He usually came straight back when he was called. This time he didn't. Perhaps he was after a rabbit."

"I see," said Petrella.

The old lady looked at him sharply and said, "I won't have him blamed for it. He's a good boy."

Petrella found out a few more things about Frank Porter. Although his great-aunt called him a boy he was, it seemed, nearly 40, and unmarried. He worked for the post office as a linesman. Clambering about on roofs. He was always as agile as a monkey, said his great-aunt.

"I suppose," said Petrella, "that when you die all your money will go to Frank?"

"Certainly," said Miss Manciple tartly. "You didn't imagine I was going to leave it to a Cats' Home, did you? It's family money and it stays in the family."

Petrella wondered what she would have said if he had told her that her great-nephew was not only planning to murder her but that his plans were well advanced.

He had already noticed that the telephone lines in Partick Terrace, which was an old block, were not buried, but came in from a feeder line at rooftop level. A piece of cake for Frank. Cut the telephone line, enter through the roof. No dog now to raise the alarm. Make his way downstairs. Knock the old lady on the head. Take care to make at least one mark with those distinctive

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shoes. Steal a few trinkets. The cat burglar would have made his sixth and positively his final appearance.

And those distinctive shoes would then be dropped in the river along with the stolen stuff. A perfect setup, spoiled only by the single mistake of dumping the umbrella and the dog in the same place.

The only question, thought Petrella, as he walked away, was why Frank Porter was in such a tearing hurry to inherit his great-aunt's money. The scene setting was understandable. As his aunt's heir he would have been the Number One Suspect if she had been killed in any orthodox way. But he had taken considerable risks. Why not wait a few years and let the money simply fall into his lap?

This question was answered when he got to Frank Porter's house, a small semidetached with a flagged path, at the end of Harraway Gardens where the road was cut off by the railway tracks.

In fact, it was answered when Petrella was ten yards from the gate.

He heard the front door of Frank's house slam and saw a bulky figure coming down the path. Dusk had fallen, but there was a bracket lamp on the railway arch which threw a light onto the front gate.

Petrella melted into the shadows. He knew the man well. He could have picked him out in a crowd from his springy walk and the set of his shoulders. As he came under the lamp, Petrella was able to confirm his first impression. It was Ted the Hoof. And Ted was one of the boys who worked for Garnet-Mounsey, the bookmaker. Ted's job was to call on customers who were slow in paying their debts. He very rarely had to call twice. If Frank Porter was in Garnet-Mounsey's debt, he could not afford to wait for his great-aunt's death.

Petrella considered the matter.

If Frank knew that his great-aunt was getting another dog he would have to move quickly. The night was already overcast, with only a new moon behind the clouds. Petrella decided to play his hunch.

He walked home, stopping on the way to buy a large tin of talcum powder. Then he had a meal, got out his old car, drove it round to Harraway Gardens, and parked it among a number of other cars which seemed to use the pavement as free garage space.

Then he climbed into the back seat, stretched his legs as far as they would go, and settled down to wait.

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He did not expect Frank Porter until after midnight.

It was two o'clock when the front door opened and a man came down the path. His feet made no noise on the flagstones. As he came out of the gate, Petrella saw a small wiry man dressed in dark overalls. He had a satchel over his shoulders and might have been any workman going out on early shift.

Except that, in his right hand, he carried a neatly rolled umbrella.

When he was opposite the car Petrella opened the door and got out.

He said, very gently, "Mr. Frank Porter?"

The man looked at him. His mouth moved, but he said nothing. Only his eyes reflected the shock.

"I have a message for you from your aunt. She's feeling a bit tired. She suggests you put off your visit till another time."

Still the man said nothing. Then he swung round abruptly, ran to the gate, and scuttled up the path. Petrella followed more slowly. He had a camera with a flash attachment in his hand. Probably the overhead lamp would have been sufficient, but it wasn't a night for taking chances.

Superintendent Haxtell examined the photographs at seven o'clock that same morning. He had been dragged out of bed and was not in the best of tempers.

He said, "*Where* did you get those prints?"

Petrella said, "From a flagstone in the front path of Frank Porter's house in Harraway Gardens. I'd sprinkled it with a lot of talcum powder. The prints are nice and clear, aren't they? You can see the sickle-shaped cut beautifully. The house has been under observation since I left. Porter hasn't come out again, but there was some activity in the back garden just before it got light. Do you think he might have been burying things?"

"It's good enough for a search warrant," said Superintendent Haxtell.

"It was an open-and-shut case as far as the burglary went," said Superintendent Haxtell. "As for the murder, the old lady never believed it. And I am not sure I did, either."

He said this many years later, when he had long since retired, to Petrella, who by then was himself a Superintendent.

"I couldn't prove it," agreed Petrella.

"And look what happened. Porter gets five years. The old

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lady dies inside three. Being the sort she was she wouldn't have drugs, so she suffered a lot. A quick knock on the head would have been a better way out, really."

"Maybe," said Petrella.

"And when Porter got out of jail, he latched onto all her money and has been making himself a thundering nuisance to the police ever since. You ought to hear what the present Super at Highside says about him. Like I told you, 'It never pays to be too clever.'"

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A JUDICIOUS HALF INCH

by URSULA CURTISS

Haddon saw the thing beginning to take shape before his very eyes on a day in July which seemed cloudless in every respect. He could even put an exact time to it, because he had just picked up his watch from the glass-topped table, timing the end of his therapeutic swim in his aunt's pool. It was exactly 1:45 P.M. when Chrissie Menlo slipped through the row of young trees that bounded the property to the north.

She was wearing a pink and white bikini that made her look a tiny 16 rather than the six she was. All of her, in fact—her pointed petal-like face, her straight swinging ash-blonde hair, the setting of her light-gray eyes—gave her the air of an adult looked at through the wrong end of binoculars. Haddon, who had a basic distrust of young children who were always clean and impeccably dressed and who nipped deftly around at cocktail parties proffering canapés and bowls of nuts, disliked her heartily.

"May I go in now, Mr. Haddon?" asked Chrissie, cocking her head prettily. "You've finished your swim."

"In fifteen minutes," said Haddon, implacable.

Chrissie cast a rebellious glance at the pool, pear-shaped, still quaking bluely from Haddon's exit. "Why does it have to be two o'clock?"

They had been over this ground many times before, and Haddon shrugged. "You know the rules," he said.

They were not his aunt's

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rules, as implied, but his own, and he was proud of them; the rules' very arbitrariness—that Chrissie and her brother Harvey could swim between two and three o'clock every other day—gave them the stamp of authenticity. His Aunt Ellen, in Spain for the summer, could hardly be appealed to.

Strong measures of self-defense were required with the Menlo children. They had evidently been brought up in the belief that they brightened the lives of all around them, and were welcome on any and every occasion for hours at a time. They sparkled with the conviction of their own worth, had been well tutored in the material value of things, and were as formidably boring as adults.

Haddon, whose recent leg wound in Vietnam had healed stiffly and imperfectly, had grown thorny when it became apparent soon after his arrival here that the Menlo parents were prepared, indulgently, to let him be their babysitter and pool guard for the summer. "He's depressed about his leg," he imagined them saying to each other, "and the children will take his mind off it."

Chrissie usually wheedled, however vainly. Today she did not. Dropping sociably down in another lawn chair she said, "My Granny's coming tonight, from New York. That's my mommy's mother, not my other grandmother. She doesn't like to be called Granny."

"I don't blame her," said Haddon with feeling.

Chrissie gave herself a little hug in what seemed an essence of feminine malice. "Daddy said why did that damned old crone have to come now?"

It was clearly a direct quote, and Haddon was mildly diverted in spite of himself. "He didn't say this to your mother, I take it."

"Oh, no, he said it to his very own self," said Chrissie, widening her eyes in astonished recollection, "and he hit his desk. He must have hurt his hand. I asked him why he hit his desk and he said he just suddenly got mad at it." She giggled, glancing archly at Haddon. "Isn't that silly, getting mad at a desk?"

It was the kind of question, demanding the kind of response, that raised Haddon's hackles. He was almost pleased at the arrival of nine-year-old Harvey—brown, somewhat fat, with a large hearty face which would someday beam at Chamber of Commerce dinners. It was the boy's habit to inquire ceremoniously about Haddon's leg once every day, and he did so now.

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"Will it ever get well?" asked Chrissie, not to be outdone in solicitude, and Harvey said reprovingly, "It's better than *no* leg. Right?"

"It's two minutes after two," said Haddon with inflection, and closed his eyes. Monumental splashes an instant later told him the children had dived in.

Perhaps because of his very annoyance at having his blessings counted for him so unctuously, his leg set up a gnawing ache. He lay consciously still in a dappling of coolness and warmth; presently, in a strange way lulled by the familiar pain, he almost slept. Birds twittered high in the branches of the sheltering cottonwood, mercifully absorbing the children's shrieks as they jumped and tussled in the water. Harvey's voice, when it came, seemed channeled startlingly into Haddon's ear, but the boy was only hanging onto the deck at the deep end of the pool, kicking his feet idly and saying, "Did Chrissie tell you about our grandmother?"

"She's coming tonight. Yes."

"That's not our grandmother who has a place at Lake Tahoe, though."

"With stables," added Chrissie, who had bobbed up beside her brother.

Both of them stared at Haddon with a kind of triumphant challenge. In command of this pool he might be, but could he ever possibly match a place at Lake Tahoe, with stables? Haddon's leg went on hurting. He said kindly, "There is absolutely nothing wrong with having stables on your property if they're kept clean. Horses have to stay somewhere, you know." And before their stunned faces could recover, "If you must dive for stones, use bigger ones. Pebbles get into the filter."

Harvey was of a more forgiving nature than Chrissie. He said as he wrapped his corpulence in a towel at the end of the swim, "I guess we'll be seeing you at six o'clock, Mr. Haddon. Mom said you were coming over for cocktails."

Haddon had forgotten about this invitation, acceded to three days earlier because there had seemed no graceful way of getting out of it. "Oh, I doubt it. With your grandmother coming—"

"Mom said to remind you 'specially," said Harvey, bestowing a keys-of-the-kingdom look, and Chrissie, still cool but wanting him to have a taste of the delights in store, said, "I'm going to wear my nurse's costume that I got for my birthday, because Granny's never seen it, and Harvey's

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going to show her his bow and arrows."

"The arrows have rubber caps on them, for now," said Harvey at an involuntary expression on Haddon's face. "Because they could be very dangerous. Well, so long, Mr. Haddon. Thanks for the swim."

They skipped off hand in hand, a practice Haddon knew he should regard as charming but which he looked on sourly instead. He plunged back into the pool and swam steadily for half an hour, alternating crawl, breaststroke, sidestroke, backstroke in obedience to his doctor's instructions. Stretched out to dry on the concrete deck, he watched the sunny marblings of the disturbed water and saw, detachedly, a different and unpleasant pattern: the "damned old crone" coming "now"; the angry fist striking the desk; the bow and arrows; even, ridiculous though it seemed, the diminutive nurse's uniform.

Most significant of all was the fact that Menlo, apparently believing himself to be alone, had spoken that casually vicious phrase aloud. To do that he must have been driven indeed.

Apart from their being the parents of such children, the Menlos were pleasant enough. Barbara Menlo was a tall slender 30, with short dark hair, an extremely long neck, and willowy shoulders. Her husband, Richard, was a good ten years older, with a face that belonged on a public-relations man, which he was—faintly humorous, horn-rimmed-and-eyeglassed, confident.

"Granny" was a surprise.

Haddon didn't know what he had expected of this relative, clearly downgraded in the children's eyes, but he was somehow startled to find Mrs. Fielding thin, tanned, calm, and very smartly dressed. It was only simple mathematics that placed her in her early fifties.

Damned old crone? Far from it, in any accepted sense, so that was the terminology of violent personal dislike, or bitter resentment. Or, coupled with the word *now*, fear.

Cocktails were on the patio. "We have to take advantage of this weather while we can," explained Barbara Menlo to her mother, "because it really blows in August and every tumbleweed in New Mexico winds up right here. And it clouds over regularly at four o'clock, although"—she turned, smiling—"I suppose I shouldn't be telling you all this, Mr. Haddon."

"Lessen the shock," said Haddon mildly. He glanced at Mrs. Fielding. "Do you live in

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Manhattan—the home of the brave?"

"Yonkers. Very different," said Mrs. Fielding. "Very small-towny, in a nice sense, if you've lived there as long as I have. Although now I—"

"Don't shoot the bartender, he's doing his best," said Menlo cheerily, gathering glasses out of startled hands. "Where's Florence Nightingale with something edible, may I ask? *Chrissie!*" he roared, and out she came, backing carefully through the sliding glass doors from the living room with a silver bowl of nuts and a plate of crackers and dip. She wore a navy cape over a child-sized white uniform, and a frilled cap which gave her the look of a ministering angel. She said reproachfully, "It's *medicine*, Daddy."

"Sorry about that, Nurse," said Menlo jovially. "Where's Harv?"

"Out putting up his target, of course," said Chrissie, indicating with her chin, and indeed a small figure could be seen in the distance, toiling back from the ditch bank at the end of the Menlo property. "Would you like some of these, Granny?"

"That's 'Grandmama'," said Barbara in a steely voice. "'Would you like some of these, Grandmama'?"

Chrissie inclined her prettily capped head and said, "I'm sorry, Grandmama. Would you?" and Mrs. Fielding inspected the offerings with none of the flustered overgratitude sometimes drawn forth from otherwise sensible adults on such occasions. "I will have a nut," she said pleasantly. "Thank you, Chrissie." Obscurely, Haddon felt like cheering.

"We're all going to a horse show tomorrow," said Chrissie, coming around to Haddon. "All Palominos, they're the prettiest horses, and they only have it once a year. Would you like to come?"

"Actually we're not, sweetie," said Barbara, looking faintly worried. "Daddy and Grandmama have some kind of mysterious appointment in the morning, so they'll be using the car. But there's an Appaloosa show next week, and I'm sure we can get to—"

"I hate Appaloosas," interrupted Chrissie in a clear steady voice, "and Daddy promised. Daddy . . .?" Always neat, she set down her burdens with care and departed into the house.

Barbara said without much apology, "She's such a single-minded child. As a matter of fact, the horse show doesn't begin until eleven, so I suppose there's a chance—"

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But Haddon's attention was on Mrs. Fielding, who had unobtrusively taken a pill from a small silver box in her purse and was gathering herself as if to rise. He said, "May I get you some water?" and she gave him a smile and nodded.

Haddon had been in the house before, and wended his way through the glass doors and angled to his right. Even if he hadn't known where the kitchen was, the tap of cracked ice and the sound of running water would have told him. From this perspective only a short stretch of counter was visible, with the drinks tray and Menlo's hands measuring and pouring Scotch over the ice in four glasses. There was also the entranced voice of Chrissie, obviously picking up an earlier thread: "... just a teensy-weensy bit sick?"

Menlo, finished with his bartending duties, raised a hand with the thumb and forefinger a judicious half inch apart. "Oh, about that much."

Out of sight, Chrissie giggled, a smothered spillover of excitement that affected Haddon like a fingernail drawn across a blackboard. There was something in the kitchen, he would have sworn it, that didn't belong among squares of late sunlight on the brick-patterned vinyl floor, the bowl of fruit, the blue pottery jar full of nasturtiums.

Menlo gave him an unruffled smile when Haddon explained his errand, but Chrissie's hand had gone swiftly to her mouth. She jumped up at once and offered to bring the glass of water to her grandmother, but just then Haddon would not have trusted her with crumbs for a sparrow. He wondered, as he followed his host outside, what kind of pills Mrs. Fielding took, and why.

Twenty minutes later she told him. The Menlos seemed to take it for granted their guests were chafing to see Harvey's prowess with bow and arrow, and struck out energetically into the field at the sound of a distant hail. Haddon and Mrs. Fielding followed more slowly, and even before she said, "I think this is far enough for me," he had guessed that her calm was really a careful and necessary pacing.

"Heart," she said in a crisp dismissive tone, as though to apologize for public pill-swallowing. "Nothing very alarming, so long as I'm careful. As a matter of fact, though, I'm much more excited than I'm supposed to be, right now ... You look like a good secret-keeper, Mr. Haddon."

Haddon assured her he was—and moved reflexively as

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Harvey, 25 feet away and apparently checking up on the attention of his audience, turned squarely around with his bow at full stretch. Sunlight shot along the length of the arrow, including the metal tip.

Menlo bellowed, "Damn it, Harv, watch that thing!" and after a second Harvey pivoted obediently and then released the arrow. Even from a distance its impact on the target was formidable, and Mrs. Fielding gave a little shudder.

"I hope they don't intend to let him aim that at birds . . . As I was saying, Mr. Haddon, Barbara doesn't know it yet because I want to surprise her, but I think I'm going to be coming out here to live. She's my only child, you know, and we've always been close. My doctor was afraid of this altitude for me, but he's found a medication that he thinks will lick that. I've been keeping my fingers crossed for a year, while Richard's been making some investments for me and looking around for a small house."

"And that's your appointment for tomorrow," said Haddon, smiling at her; her pleasure was contagious.

"Yes, he thinks he's found what I want. I really don't know what you make of me, confiding all my plans like this, but I had to tell someone."

"I won't say a word," promised Haddon, but as soon as he had spoken he felt a chill flash over him. With the mention of investments, Menlo's furious *now* might well be explained: how often before had men appropriated money entrusted to them, assuring themselves that there would be plenty of time to replace it? Or was Haddon merely prejudiced, largely because he didn't like the children? And even if he was right in his impression of a sharpening pattern, how could he, a near-stranger to this likable woman, warn her in a way which would not seem mad or monstrous or both?

Harvey had sent off his other arrows and was packing up his target while the Menlos and little navy-and-white Chrissie, anchoring her frilly cap with one hand, started back toward them. "I hope Chrissie won't let that uniform go to her head," said Haddon, choosing his words with care. "I have a little niece"—this was a firm and fluent lie—"who thought she could really dispense medicine, and made the whole family ill for a week."

Mrs. Fielding gazed at him thoughtfully. "Oh, I'm sure Chrissie wouldn't do anything like that," she said.

Haddon was pressed to stay

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for dinner, but he went home. For the rest of the evening he told himself variously that he had a suspicious mind; that it was impossible to guarantee the safety of another person, especially someone you had barely met; that Barbara Menlo must know, in a general way, of investments made for her mother by her husband over the course of a year. He also convinced himself that, the change in altitude notwithstanding, Mrs. Fielding's heart condition could hardly be such that her sudden death would pass unquestioned.

The ambulance left the Menlo driveway at 9:30 the next morning, but the police cars were there for another hour. It was not until five o'clock that afternoon that Haddon learned the exact sequence of events.

Chrissie (getting the last bit of mileage out of her nurse's costume, reflected Haddon grimly) had dispensed chocolate-covered mints after dinner, and they had all retired early in deference to Mrs. Fielding's fatigue. In the morning Barbara Menlo had tiptoed out of the bedroom to wake her mother, deciding to give her husband another twenty minutes of sleep while she started breakfast, and then gone back to rouse him, and could not.

It was several hours too late for that.

And Chrissie had come skipping along the carpeted hall outside the door which her mother had instinctively closed, her gray eyes full of mischief. "I think we're going to be able to go to the horse show after all," she said, "because"—she held her lifted thumb and forefinger a judicious half inch apart—"Daddy's going to be just a teensy-weensy bit sick."

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THE MAN WHO READ G. K. CHESTERTON

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

"With Father O'Toole on the youth-group outing and Mrs. Surmin having a day off, there's just the two of us to keep the rectory running properly, Charles." Monsignor Francis Gogherty lowered himself gingerly into the chair at the head of the long dining table, made the sign of the cross, and murmured a short benediction. "I hope you don't mind cold ham and deviled eggs," he went on. "That's what Mrs. Surmin left in the icebox for us."

At the far end of the table Father Charles Kenney smiled at his pastor's use of the word "icebox." At the age of 72 Monsignor Gogherty was not about to let some newfangled invention like a refrigerator change his speech patterns.

"I note that you're wearing not only your collar but also your suit coat at table, Charles," the Monsignor con-

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tinued. "A commendable practice. But since, in spite of my urging, both you and Father O'Toole usually adopt a somewhat less formal mode of dress, I suspect something's on your mind, and you're trying to butter me up before discussing it with me. Out with it, lad. What is it?"

Father Kenney ran his fingers through his close-cropped hair. Lad, indeed! His 42nd birthday was just a month away. But to the Monsignor anyone not old enough to collect Social Security was a mere child.

"It's about Tim Harrington," Father Kenney began haltingly. "I've been reading up on the case in today's paper. And I don't believe we have the right to refuse—"

"Oh?" Monsignor Gogherty's eyebrows shot up. "So now it's a case, is it? May I suggest, Charles, that you stick to Holy Writ and keep your nose out of those penny-dreadful detective stories you've become so fond of."

"Sir, I hardly think you can classify Gilbert K. Chesterton as an author of penny-dreadfuls," replied Father Kenney. "Why, his critical essays alone would earn him a place in literary history, to say nothing of his works on St. Francis and St. Thomas Aquinas. And then—"

"Then there's that priest who goes around playing detective," interrupted Monsignor Gogherty. "The one your room's littered with stories about. Father Black, isn't it?"

"Father Brown, Monsignor."

"Brown, Black, what's the difference? We all have a place in this world, Charles, and that of the priest is not messing about trying to do the work of the police."

"But, sir, the beauty of the Father Brown stories is in the insights the priest has about the other characters. In *The Hammer of God* you actually feel a certain amount of pity for the murderer. Then there's *The Man in the Passage* in which several people reveal new facets about their personalities after witnessing the same—"

"Charles, I've had enough of Father Brown. I take it, though, that there's some connection in your mind between him and the Harrington suicide."

Father Kenney allowed himself a soft chuckle. "Yes, I suppose so. You see, I know—knew—Tim Harrington quite well. We served on several committees together, and I've been to his house for meals a few times. He has a fine wife and two delightful little girls. And—well, he just couldn't have committed suicide. It wasn't in his character."

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"Charles, I read the papers too, you know. Especially when the news has to do with one of St. Bartholomew's parishioners. And the evidence in the Harrington case is quite clear. Suicide, pure and simple."

"But evidence can be—"

"Evidence is evidence!" Monsignor Gogherty shouted. "I'm sorry, Charles. Forgive me for raising my voice. But it was all in the newspaper. Yesterday morning Timothy Harrington entered his office on the top floor of the Professional Building at nine o'clock. The elevator operator remembers the time. About thirty minutes later a shot was heard. The building guard investigated and finally let himself into Harrington's office with a master key when nobody answered his knocking. He found Harrington lying on the floor, shot through the head. There were powder burns about the wound and a smoking gun in his hand. What do you need to convince you, lad? Motion pictures of the actual shooting?"

"Speaking of pictures, Monsignor, there's the one found under the body," said Father Kenney. "Tim Harrington would never—"

"That picture is the crux of the whole matter," said the older man. "Obviously the papers couldn't print the picture, but their description left no doubt as to what kind of thing it was. Lewd, filthy."

"Hard-core pornography, no doubt about it. But that's my point. Tim Harrington would never traffic in anything like that."

"But it was there in his office. He must have been looking at it. I suggest to you that in spite of what you think, he was peddling that trash to innocent people. Corrupting clean minds for money. And perhaps his conscience finally troubled him to the extent that he could no longer tolerate life itself. Or, more likely, he received notification that someone was threatening to expose him. In either case, suicide would be fully explained."

"Then you still intend to—"

"Deny Timothy Harrington the last rites of the Church? Of course that's what I intend. The issue is quite clear. Oh, I realize that a more liberal person might take the position that suicide is *ipso facto* proof of mental disorder. But then what becomes of personal responsibility? No, lad, St. Bartholomew's will not be party to a funeral Mass or the burial of a suicide while I'm the pastor."

"But, Monsignor, consider his family. Aren't they going through enough without adding to their trouble?"

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"I feel sorry for the family, of course. But not enough to disregard Church doctrine. The one who should have considered the family was Timothy Harrington—before he killed himself."

"Sir, I must protest. You have no right to condemn Tim Harrington in the eyes of the Church. You have no right to hurt his wife and daughters by—"

Monsignor Gogherty's fist struck the table with a blow that rattled the glasses and silverware. "As the pastor of St. Bartholomew's I have every right!" he thundered. "Someday, Charles, with luck you'll have a parish of your own. In the meantime I will make the decisions in this one."

There was a long silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock in the corner of the room. Father Kenney realized he had been wrong to be drawn into open argument with his pastor. And yet he also knew through years of working with Timothy Harrington that the man had earned and now deserved a Christian burial. If only he could convince Monsignor Gogherty. Or even better, if he could—

"Monsignor," he said softly, "please forgive my harsh words."

"Eh? Well—oh, I suppose so," was the growled reply.

"But I wonder what will happen when Bishop Dalton gets word of your decision," Father Kenney went on smoothly.

"The Bishop? Why, he'll approve, of course. Why wouldn't he?"

"Remember, sir, that only last year Tim Harrington was appointed to that special diocesan committee by Bishop Dalton himself. Now how's the Bishop going to feel when he learns that you refused Harrington a proper burial without any investigation whatsoever?"

Monsignor Gogherty considered the question gravely. It would hardly do for him to be overruled by the Bishop. And then another thought struck him. He looked oddly at Father Kenney.

"That's what this whole thing's been getting around to, isn't it, lad?" he asked.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Oh, don't play the innocent with me. You want to pretend you're that Father Brown chap. The priest who plays detective. Isn't that it?"

This last remark brought Father Kenney up short. Was he interested only in the eventual fate of the late Tim Harrington, or did he really have the urge to emulate Chesterton's little priest and solve a crime? The

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idea that he might be motivated even in part by the latter reason was totally unworthy of a man of God. And yet Father Kenney was honest enough to admit he didn't know the answer to the pastor's question.

"Well, you may have a point, lad," Monsignor Gogherty went on, "whatever your reasons. So I'll allow you your investigation, although I doubt you'll turn up anything the police haven't already found. But I'll not accept any nonsense about insanity. I'll reverse my decision only if you find convincing proof that Harrington didn't kill himself."

"Thank you, sir," Father Kenney replied. "When can I get started?"

"Tomorrow's your free day. You can devote your full time to it. I'll expect your report at the evening meal."

"You mean I have only one day?"

"Of course. Later this week you have those weddings, and then there's novena. And I'll expect you to serve your regular time on duty. So tomorrow's as long as I can spare you. And one more thing, lad."

"Yes, Monsignor?"

"That wide-brimmed hat he wore suited Father Brown very well. On you it would look foolish. Don't forget, Charles, you're a real priest, not a character in a detective story."

The fact that Father Kenney had been the official chaplain for the police force of the village for the past six years opened a lot of doors for him when he began his investigation the following morning. Patrolman Dom Virgilio, who often took up collections at Father Kenney's Masses, quickly ushered him into the squadroom, where he was introduced to Detective John Unsell who was in charge of the Harrington case. Unsell, a heavy-set man with a mop of unruly blond hair, looked up grimly from the report he was typing. It was obvious that Unsell had no desire to talk to the priest and was only doing it as a favor to Virgilio.

"You got most of the facts we have, just by reading the paper," Unsell began when Father Kenney had given his reason for calling. "Harrington got to his law office at nine. Forty minutes after that he was discovered shot through the head, and he had a pistol in his hand—a .38. It was his own gun, by the way, and he had a permit to keep it in his office. The bullet went completely through the skull and punctured the glass in the window in the east wall of the office.

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That's about it. What could we say except that he'd committed suicide?"

"Oh? Then the bullet was never recovered?"

"Look, Father Kenney, at five stories the Professional Building is the tallest one around. That bullet went over the roofs and out of the business district. It's probably lodged in a tree somewhere."

"But the hole in the window? Are you sure—"

Unsell stubbed out a cigarette in the ashtray and immediately lit another. "Give us credit for knowing our stuff, padre," he said. "When a bullet hits a pane of glass it doesn't knock the whole pane out. It just punches a neat little hole. And the lab crew was able to tell us that the hole is in keeping with a slightly misshapen .38 slug having passed through—from the inside out."

Father Kenney's face fell. The police certainly hadn't taken the apparent suicide at face value. What could his investigation possibly turn up that hadn't already been considered?

"You said the body was discovered at nine forty," he said. "But the papers place the time of the shot at nine thirty. What about that?"

Unsell thrust the newly lit cigarette into a paper container with dregs of cold coffee in the bottom and listened to the hiss. "You're really grasping at straws, aren't you, Father?" he said, trying to keep the annoyance out of his voice. He went on as if he were explaining something to a backward child. "The shot *was* heard at nine thirty. But nobody knew where it came from at the time. The guard and a couple of custodians had to check every office in the building. It took them ten minutes to get to the top floor. Okay?"

"And the picture, the one found under the body?" There was a note of desperation in Father Kenney's voice.

"The picture was a slide—you know, one of those transparent things in a little cardboard frame. The subject? Let's just say it's the type of thing weirdos peddle in dark alleyways. It showed a man and a woman who were—well, it wasn't the kind of thing I'd want my kids to look at." Unsell turned back to his report.

"Please, I know you're busy," said Father Kenney, "but this is very important to me. These transparent slides, don't they require a projector of some kind?"

"It's not absolutely necessary, but the fact is, Harrington had one. It was set up on his

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desk. A real complicated machine—remote control and all that. There was also a screen at the far end of the room."

At last Father Kenney thought he was getting somewhere. "Doesn't it seem a little unusual, Detective Unsell," he said shyly, "that a lawyer would have a slide projector and screen in his office?" He waited expectantly for the answer.

"No."

"I beg your pardon?"

"No, it doesn't seem unusual. Harrington often took pictures to help him with some of his law cases. Almost everyone in the building knew he had a projector and screen. Of course, none of them knew he was using it to show dirty pictures." He turned again to the typewriter and began laboriously pecking at the letters. "That's all I can tell you, Father," he growled. "Look, you'll have to excuse me. This report's overdue."

Father Kenney slowly got to his feet. That was the end of it. The police had all the facts. All he had was a deep conviction that Tim Harrington would never, under any circumstances, have taken his own life. But knowledge of a man's character wasn't hard evidence.

Father Kenney looked forward with dread to the evening meal at the rectory and the gibes he'd hear from Monsignor Gogherty. He was certain the Monsignor would bring up Father Brown again.

But even Father Brown couldn't do more in the circumstances.

Or could he?

"Yes!" The priest shouted the word into the stagnant air of the squadroom, freezing in their places three detectives, a uniformed patrolman, and a suspected pickpocket who'd been brought in for questioning. Unsell, his index finger poised over the typewriter, looked up at Father Kenney in astonishment.

"Yes what, Father?" he asked.

"Yes, there is some other answer to Tim Harrington's death besides suicide," was the crisp reply. "And I intend to find it if it takes all day. Mr. Unsell, I would like to see the office where he died."

"Oh, come on, padre. That office is sealed. Nobody can go in there without an official okay."

"Look, Unsell," snapped the priest. "You're new around here—at least, I've never seen you before. But I've been police chaplain for the past six years. I've done everything the job requires, from giving talks at the Benevolent Association

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dinners to saying Masses for men killed or wounded in the line of duty. Now I'm asking for one little favor. And by all that's holy I'm going to get it—or you guys can get yourselves a new chaplain!"

Unsell looked the priest up and down. "Father Kenney," he began in a voice menacingly soft, "I don't have to—" He was interrupted by Detective Raymond Case tapping him on the shoulder.

"He'll do it, Johnny," said Case. "He'll quit, just like he says. You don't know Father Chuck when he gets this sore."

"What do I care? I'm a Methodist."

"Yeah, but most of the guys here go to St. Bartholomew's. And you gotta work with us, remember?"

"But the room is officially sealed. Besides, this report—"

"So unseal the room. You're in charge of the case. And I'll finish your report myself. Okay?"

"Ahh." Unsell started to say more, looked at Father Kenney, then thought better of it. Grabbing his hat, he stalked to the door, followed by the now-smiling priest. "Let's go, padre," he grumbled.

Timothy Harrington's office, one of the largest in the Professional Building, remained as nearly as possible in the same condition it had been in two days earlier when his body had been discovered. There was even a chalked outline on the dark brown rug to show where he had lain in death.

"Try not to touch anything," warned Unsell. "The lab boys have dusted the place for prints, but they may want to come back and do some more looking around."

Father Kenney placed his hands firmly in his pockets and glanced around. The eastern wall of the office was dominated by a wide window, flanked by maroon velvet drapes which hung from a brass rod and were tied back with thick ropes that gleamed as if made of gold. On the large desk in front of the window sat a slide projector, pointed at a screen at the far end of the room. Two of the other walls were lined with shelves of books, and on the fourth were hung several diplomas and award plaques. A small door on this same wall led to a tiny lavatory and a storage closet.

"Well, Mr. Great Detective," said Unsell with heavy sarcasm, "this is it. We've found about six zillion latent prints in here, most of which we're trying to run down. Seems like Harrington had just about everybody in town for a client at one time or

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another. So come up with a clue, will you? Show me you can do my job better'n I can."

Father Kenney walked around the desk and peered at the window. The upper pane had a tiny hole in it, just above the horizontal dividing strip. Three cracks radiated from the hole to the edge of the glass. The priest rubbed his thumb and forefinger against the tied-back drapes and then touched the hole gingerly.

"Hey, leave that alone!" barked Unsell. "You might knock out a chip of glass or something. How am I to know that hole won't turn out to be important at the inquest?"

The hand was rapidly pulled back. "Mr. Unsell," said Father Kenney softly, "about those pictures. Did Harrington develop his own?"

"Nope. He had 'em done at Benton's Photo Shop, just down the street. Matter of fact, Benton was sending some new ones over the same morning Harrington shot himself. Only the delivery man had to return 'em because by the time he got here the police had the office closed off. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I just thought that since the one picture was important to the case, the others might be, too."

"Maybe they were to Harrington, but not to us. Twenty slides of an automobile accident in a liability case he was handling, that's all. Besides, that one picture we found under the body wasn't developed at Benton's."

"Oh? How do you know?"

"The cardboard around the picture. Benton has a little ad for his shop on everything he processes. The one we found had a plain white frame."

"I see." Father Kenney's shoulders sagged. "And you haven't touched anything in here?"

"The body was removed after it had been photographed. The smooth surfaces were dusted for fingerprints. When we went through Harrington's papers looking for a suicide motive we were careful to put everything back just the way we found it. So can I take you home now and get back to work?"

Slowly Father Kenney nodded. He had failed, no mistake about that. The police had covered everything he could think of. He walked out of the office ahead of Unsell considering how lucky Father Brown had been that his author had strewn clues about for the fictional priest to find and interpret. G. K. Chesterton should be working on this case, he thought wryly.

They left the building and

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strode to Unsell's car at the curb. Unsell motioned the priest inside, closed the door behind him, then got in behind the wheel. Groping in his pocket for the keys, Unsell was unaware of Father Kenney's preoccupation with the morning sun glinting off the hood and front fenders of the car.

"Mr. Unsell," said the priest softly as the key slid into the ignition, "what kind of day was it when Harrington died?"

"Huh?"

"The weather. What was it like?"

"Fine. Just like today. Sunny, not a cloud in the sky. Why?"

The starter began to whir. "Stop!" cried Father Kenney suddenly. "Turn it off. I've got to go back to that office."

Unsell gave a deep sigh. "You were already up there," he almost moaned.

"Yes, but before I didn't know what I was looking for. Now I do."

"But—"

"Listen, in ten more minutes I'll know positively if Harrington committed suicide. Isn't that what you've spent the last two days trying to find out?"

"Yeah, yeah. Okay, come on. But I'm only doing this because I want to keep on speaking terms with the other guys I work with."

The Harrington office was just as they had left it. Unsell looked at Father Kenney who turned to him, eyes shining with excitement.

"Stand over there near where Harrington's body was found," said the priest. "That's it. The time now, Mr. Unsell, is just a few minutes before ten—for all practical purposes the same time at which, two days ago, Tim Harrington supposedly shot himself."

"So?" the detective asked resignedly.

"So pretend for a minute that you're Harrington. You're preparing to show some slides. What would be the first thing you'd do?"

"Why . . . I guess I'd get out the projector and screen. I'd probably set them up just about the way they are here."

"Okay, fine. What next?"

"Probably I'd plug in the projector and start showing the pictures. Look, Father, I know you believe that Harrington couldn't have killed himself, but according to the evidence—"

"Unsell, you've been cursed with lack of imagination," said Father Kenney. "Don't you see, he couldn't possibly show the pictures!"

"Why not?"

"The window, man! Look out the window."

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Unsell turned, shading his eyes. "We're too high up to see much," he said. "Besides, the sun's shining right in my eyes." After a pause the detective began to nod his head. "That's what you're getting at, isn't it? The sun."

"Of course. This room faces east. So the morning sun would be shining into the room through that window, making it impossible to project slides with any degree of clarity."

"Yeah," murmured Unsell. "You've got something. Harrington would have had to pull the drapes, that's for sure. But they were open when we got here. And nobody in the building said anything about touching them. But maybe Harrington opened them himself—before he shot himself."

"Maybe," said Father Kenney, walking to the window. "Let's pull the drapes." He released the gold tie-back ropes and pulled the thick draperies across the window. The room was immediately plunged into an eerie gloom.

"Now it occurs to me," Father Kenney went on, "that if Harrington were contemplating suicide after seeing the picture, he'd do it in this atmosphere, rather than having the sun beating in on him."

"You're just guessing, padre. That's not proof."

"True, Mr. Unsell. By the way, do you have a pocket flashlight?"

"Sure, on my keychain. Here."

There was a clinking of keys as the flashlight was passed to Father Kenney. He pressed the switch, and a circle of light the size of a silver dollar gleamed on the maroon cloth. Behind him the priest could hear Unsell's breathing.

Taking a ballpoint pen from his pocket, Father Kenney probed delicately at the drapery material. Suddenly the pen penetrated the cloth.

"There's a hole in the drapes right at this spot," he said. "Just opposite the hole in the glass."

"It must have been made by the same bullet that killed Harrington," said Unsell. "But if the drapes were closed when he was shot, then who—"

"Exactly the question I'm going to ask if I hear another word about Tim Harrington's 'suicide'," said Father Kenney, throwing open the drapes so that sunlight again flooded the room. "Who opened the drapes after Harrington was lying dead on the floor?"

"It had to be whoever shot him," said Unsell. "Unless the guard who found the body lied to us, which I doubt. But who could it have been, Father?"

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"As I've often been reminded lately, that's your job, not mine," answered the priest. "But I might offer a logical line of inquiry. Let's assume that whoever made the deliveries of the slides from Benton's Photo Shop was the same person who's been responsible for peddling those pornographic pictures. On the day Harrington was shot, this person had two deliveries to make—the pictures of the auto accident to Mr. Harrington and a packet of the other pictures to someone else. He came to Harrington's office first. Suppose he gave Harrington the wrong package."

"Yeah, I see," Unsell was now excited. "And Harrington put the pictures in his projector while the delivery man was still there. When Harrington saw what the pictures were, he threatened the man with exposure—probably he took out the pistol to make sure the guy didn't leave the office."

Father Kenney nodded. "There could have been a struggle in which Harrington was shot through the head. Our unknown person used the few minutes he had before the guard got to this office to put the gun in Harrington's hand and pick up the pictures. He probably threw back the drapes so he could see if any pictures had dropped on the floor. But he missed the one under Harrington's body."

Suddenly Father Kenney held up an admonishing finger. "We've been talking as if we knew how the murder took place," he said. "Actually we haven't a shred of proof."

"We'll find proof," said Unsell.

"I wish you luck," said the priest. "I'll pray for your success, but that's all the help you'll be getting from me. My job was finished the moment you admitted that Tim Harrington's death wasn't a suicide. But if you don't mind, I'd rather you didn't inform Monsignor Gogherty of that fact. I'd like to tell him myself."

That evening, at dinner in the St. Bartholomew's rectory, Father Kenney was seated at one side of the large table at the end of which was Monsignor Gogherty. Across from Father Kenney sat the younger curate, Father O'Toole, oblivious of his pastor's disdain for the grimy sweatshirt he was wearing. Monsignor Gogherty murmured a benediction of which Father Kenney caught only the last few words: "Bless this day's endeavors and make them fruitful." Crossing himself, Father Kenney uttered a fervent "Amen."

"Now," said Monsignor

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Gogherty, seating himself, "while we wait for Mrs. Surmin to bring our food I have a question for Father Brown here." He smiled archly. "Forgive me, I mean for Father Kenney, our budding detective. What say you, lad? Give us the results—if any—of your investigation."

Father Kenney's reply was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Surmin. "You'll have to wait a bit for the stew," she said. "I've been on the telephone. It was for you, Father Kenney—somebody named Unsell. You're to call him back."

"Did he say anything else?" asked Father Kenney.

"Just that he's been investigating some delivery man. He said to tell you the man's name is Colin Patten and his sister's the girl in some photograph—he said you'd know which one. There was something about the case looking better all the time. Then Mr. Unsell said that Timothy Harrington's murder—he laid a lot of stress on that word 'murder'—would probably be solved within a week."

"Thank you," said Father Kenney. He turned back to Monsignor Gogherty, whose mouth had opened in amazement at Mrs. Surmin's last remark.

"Now then, sir," said Father Kenney, "what was that you were asking about Father Brown and me?"

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a *NEW* "strange" story by

JAMES POWELL

No one can describe this story. You simply have to read it . . . and let it wash over you, soaking into every cleft and fissure, and then, possibly—voila! . . . or on rereading let it beat against you like a mountaintop wind, seeking out every cleft and fissure, aerating you, until, possibly—voila!

Now, let us climb up the face of Death's Door . . .

THE ASCENT OF THE GRIMSELHORN

by JAMES POWELL

Like Eden's Adam, our own Gordon Prior has a knack for naming things created by others. If the Jolly Roger tobacco people want to introduce a new, king-size, mentholated cigarette, they consult Prior and he works his magic (Jolly Green Giants). And when the Hiawatha Beer Corporation launches its new Pilsner line, Prior officiates at the christening (Brew-Ha-Ha; also available in handy little 7-ounce Mini-Ha-Ha bottles).

Grotesque, but hardly reason enough to kill the man, you say? I suppose so. The fact is, if it wasn't for my bothersome heart condition, the result of a childhood illness, I mightn't have been obliged to kill him at all. Take tonight. When Prior answered our host's "I believe you two know each other" with a vague "Ah, yes, Tompkins, isn't it?" I might have replied, "No you smug idiot, it's Thompson" and challenge him to step outside. There, holding one hand behind my back to make up for my advantage in size, I would have paid back all his wordless insults and all his contemptuous glances. Then perhaps I would have helped him up, offered my hand, and we might have become good friends.

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After all, that sometimes happens in books, doesn't it? But as I was saying about my heart, it requires me to shepherd my vital powers by assuming certain traits which are not mine by nature. So it is that my friends call me timid and my enemies call me a coward.

That's Prior there—the one across the table talking to the tawny-haired beauty. He is rolling an imaginary something between thumb and forefinger and sticking out his tongue. I strain to hear. He is describing his latest account, a Japanese firm with a candy-coated nicotine substitute on a stick. Prior tells tawny hair his name for it: Raleigh Pops. Of its own accord my hand grabs for the knife in the pocket of my dinner jacket.

But I restrain myself—the time has not yet come.

To recover my calm I ponder the secret of Prior's charm. Why mothers adore him I can understand: he is, after all, unmarried and wealthy. And he exudes a kind of excitement; he jingles the coins in his pocket and seems always on the verge of either breaking into a tap dance or eloping with their daughters.

But what do the daughters see in this stubby goblin-headed man with a nose like a beak and coarse black hair that infects even the backs of his hands? Not that Prior is without accomplishments. Among other things, he's a master of the after-dinner narrative. The most requested of his pieces is known as "The Ascent of the Grimselhorn." Back in his university days Prior led some mountaineering friends on the first successful assault of that formidable Alp. I have already heard the story six times. And if I'm to kill him, I must hear it a seventh. Tonight, I hope.

Tonight it is. Coffee had scarcely been served when the cry goes up and is quickly seconded ("Yes, yes, the Grimselhorn"). Prior smiles at his companion. It is obvious she has not heard it before. Then he nods to the rest of the table, carries his chair to the middle of the room, and returns to his place.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announces with a sweeping gesture that goes from the foot of the chair to the ceiling above it, "the pride of the Noric Alps, the southeast face of the Grimselhorn, called by some Death's Door. Altitude 11,103 feet above sea level and above the picturesque hamlet of Grimsel, population 4654. Let me lead you to the summit where, until 1954, no man had ever trod."

If, by the way, you want the names of the other members of that original party, you'll have to go to the record book where

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they are listed as T. Alberts, T. Peacock, and J. Tapscot. A tiny stiletto following Tapscot's name sends the eye plummeting down to the bottom of the page and a footnote: "Died in attempt." Prior never mentions these others by name or touches on Tapscot's death. The Ascent of the Grimselhorn is the story of one man's triumph—Prior's.

"Imagine the mountain as an immense uncut diamond," he tells us, "and the leader of the party as the diamond cutter." Screwing an imaginary jeweler's loupe into his eye, Prior cups both hands as if to hold the diamond and peers down into the heart of the stone. "Each flaw within may be a way through the diamond, a path to the summit. And so he must learn them all in order to plot his cut. And then, at last—"

He draws back an invisible cutter's mallet. The guests lean forward. (Once, when I chose this moment to cough, it was like stumbling uninvited into a banquet of hissing Medusas.) Prior brings down his hand. "—the quick dash for the summit.

"Well, come then," he says. "Death's Door awaits." And for the seventh time, sitting with my napkin a crisp ball at my elbow, I set out up the mountain. Prior leads the way, explaining, snapping the nylon rope between his fists to prove it will stretch a third of its length and bear 4000 pounds before breaking, striking his ice ax against a rock so we can hear its true well-tempered ring, rubbing a pair of his extra socks between thumb and forefinger until we all understand why qiviut, the underwool of the musk ox, is superior to the lowly sheep's.

As we go, Prior traces our course from Grimsel across the upper pastures to the foot of the Grimselhorn by making baby steps from the table across the carpet to the left leg of the chair. To show the next stage he runs his finger up the leg to the seat.

He talks as he leads us. As always, the words make the early morning sun warm my cheek and I smell the perfume of a flower he tells me is the Alpine rose. Above us, on the left, sheep move like gray clouds across a sky of grass. Soon Prior is into his routine about crampons and pitons, cornices and crevasses. I've never found this particularly interesting, so I don't even bother to listen. In fact, I've fallen back behind the others, walking, thinking my own thoughts for a change.

All of a sudden something is urging me to turn and look

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back at Grimsel. Now, instead of waiting as I always have before, until we crest the knee and Prior calls our attention to the quaint scene below, the toy rooftops pierced by the bedpost steeple of the church. I turn. There in a second-floor window of the hotel—how did I know it was Prior's room?—is a woman's face. How can I tell at that distance that she—barely a woman, a girl, really—is no stranger to me? And yet I knew.

The sun was high by the time we reached the crest of the knee. Prior marked this event by crouching on the seat of the chair and tracing the next leg of our ascent with his finger on the embroidery. We will cross the lap diagonally, avoiding all but the narrow southeast spur of the Grimselwasser glacier, until we have reached the back of the chair, the face of the Grimselhorn itself. But this we would not assault directly. Instead we would make the 1500-foot climb to the arm of the chair where we would pass the night.

The grass beneath our feet was quickly giving way to rocks, the rocks to boulders. On our left and right the high aretes of the mountain cut into the sky. Behind us Grimsel has disappeared below the knee. Ahead of us stands the mountain, a king with the ermine of the glacier coiled like a train at his feet. Prior talks. He tells us how rough the going is underfoot and our calves begin to ache. He explains that snow flurries are common above 6000 feet and a sudden sunshine blizzard throws whirling shadows all around us.

We are now negotiating the spur of the glacier, testing for rotten ice and hidden crevasses, leaping the gurgling chasms when we can and weaving our way back and forth between them when we cannot. Prior points out the general area where Gaspari and the Italian team were surprised by a snowstorm and swallowed up by the ice. He tells the story of Gaspari's widow. At the time the experts calculated that the climbers' bodies would be delivered to the base of the glacier in 40 years. When Signora Gaspari, no less beautiful because of her widow's weeds, announced to the reporters assembled at the Grimsel railway station that she had come to keep her vigil until then, a million Italians wept unashamedly over their morning newspapers. Six months later she married Grimsel's burgomeister, himself a widower. Today she runs the village souvenir shop and has children with names like Hans and Fritz. Prior's

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story is calculated to make the women feel unworthy.

Now we have reached the base of the right-hand arete. The way to the arm where we will pass the night begins as a giant's staircase of crooks and turns, and ends as a vertical maze of twisting chimneys and couloirs and dizzying ledges. We hurry because the sun is already standing above the left arete. But my heart's drumbeat is even and secure.

As he always does to show that we have gained the camp-site, Prior crouches on the arm of the chair like a bird on a winter bough. But this time he is wearing a smile I've never seen before, the smile of someone who knows he's being admired. I look down the table. All eyes are on him. But that isn't it. He is looking beyond the table toward Grimsel in the valley below.

As I turn to look, I remember the one-legged Caparetto veteran in the Grimsel town square, the one with the brass and nickel telescope for hire. I know that the girl who was in the window is now watching Prior through the telescope. It comes to me as no great revelation that she is Tapscot's sister. J. Tapscot, the one who died.

The sun has set and now that strange light called Alpine Glow has faded. We have dined on dehydrated food and taken shelter in tents. Prior, still crouched on the arm of the chair, wets an indelible point on his tongue and pretends to write in his journal: "We are exhausted, bone-tired." (The table sags; a bare-shouldered woman sends her husband for her wrap.) "Outside the wind has risen and it has started to snow. Will it dawn clear or will the weather force us to turn back? Tormented by uncertainty, we fall into fitful sleep." Prior closes his eyes and nods. I half expect him to tuck his head under his wing, poor thing.

The knife is a cold wound against my flesh and I cannot sleep. As it has a thousand times before my mind runs past the deed. I imagine our host's measured voice breaking the initial silence. "If the ladies will excuse us," he is saying, "we will adjourn to our brandy and cigars." He will lead me into the study. The other men will follow, the last two dragging Prior's body by the heels.

Closing the door behind us, our host will put his hand on my shoulder and say, "Thompson, we've all been wondering just how much more of that man's insults and humiliations you could swallow. Congratulations on a job well done." Murmurs of approval.

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Then our host calls for volunteers to dispose of the body Hands shoot up. Two golf partners offer to drop the weighted remains into a bottomless water trap. An amateur bricklayer is eager to wall it up in the wine cellar behind the amontillado. A frozen-meat-pie king about to dispatch a shipment to the Cannibal Isles makes a very grim suggestion.

That settled, we gather around the body for the traditional last few words. ("He was a braggart," says one. "A seducer of his friends' sisters," says another. "A man devoid of good taste," says an upstate New York snack manufacturer who lost heavily when Prior dubbed his new product Buffalo Chips.) Then we would rejoin the ladies. Later, as Meaghan the butler helps me on with my coat, he whispers, "God bless you, sir," and I leave with the tawny-haired beauty on my arm. A thoroughly agreeable evening.

While my mind was wandering, day has dawned clear on the Noric Alps and Prior has already led us well up the face of the Grimselhorn. We are struggling against rock and wind and sometimes, it seems, against the very sky itself. And all the time Prior's words are driving us. Time and again he saves us from disaster—a slip, a moment of panic, a crumbling cornice—as we crawl like flies up the face of Death's Door, bound together by his words like climbers in a nylon rope.

We are approaching the place where I must kill—there, just below the summit where the mountain presents its final challenge. To avoid an impassable overhang Prior must inch his way out along the merest toehold of a ledge. He shows he's reached the ledge by balancing himself on the top of the back of the chair. Now he creeps sideways, teetering for effect.

In a moment, as he reaches for his goal, I must kill him. Too bad in a way, for the finale is quite effective theater. His arms still strain upward. His fingers will grip the summit and pull—then press—as though forcing a stubborn window shut. All the while his knees will be straightening until he's standing erect.

Next a little jump, a turn in the air, and Prior will land, hands on hips, on the back of the chair again. This and his final "The Grimselhorn has been mastered!" aren't as hammy as they sound. But you'll have to take my word for it.

The time has arrived. No one sees me as I come around the end of the table. No one sees the knife in my hand. Prior, balanced atop the chair, is

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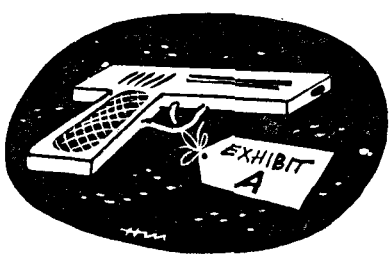
shouting about the wind, how it wants to tear him from the mountain like a giant bird defending its nest. I feel its icy wingbeat myself.

A few steps more and I'm at Prior's side. But still no one sees me. I am not there. Only Prior and the Grimselhorn are real. I am nothing but a phantom and I hold a phantom knife. Prior's ice ax, the one that rings so true, lies heavy with life there on the ledge at his feet.

I grab it up and raise it over my head. Yes, then the table stirs and mutters. Yes, then Prior turns and sees me. "For God's sake, Tapscot, what are you doing up here?" he shouts. "Get back in the damn rope! Get back!"

Prior named me. I am Tapscot. The name turns the rock beneath my feet to rubble and I begin a shuddering downward slide. Fear shakes my heart the way a dog shakes a bone. Then my fingers are clawing at air and I am falling through the sunlight toward the green carpet of the valley below.



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a *NEW* Ponsonby story by

ALAN K. YOUNG

Until now Amos Ponsonby, Professor of English emeritus at Briarwood College, has been a detective only in a limited sense. As a code and cipher expert (simon-pure, not professional), Ponsonby has solved crimes by unraveling secret messages. But remember the evolution of Edward D. Hoch's Nick Velvet, the unique thief? To continue stealing successfully, Nick Velvet had to become a detective, in the tradition of Maurice Leblanc's Arsene Lupin: only by first solving a crime could Nick steal the particular things he specialized in pilfering.

In a similar way Professor Ponsonby has also widened his field of operations. True, in this new case, he still uncovers the secret of a mysterious message, but in the murder of Frank Brindley, florist and gentleman-farmer, found dead in an empty, snow-covered pasture, Ponsonby goes far beyond codes and ciphers. The retired English professor is now a full-fledged detective . . .

TO SEE DEATH COMING

by ALAN K. YOUNG

"Act One, Scene Two, line one," said Mrs. Garvey. "Yes, Chief, I've got that, and I'll go right now and ask. What? No, no. He's been up this half hour. He's at breakfast now, though heaven knows he doesn't eat enough these cold mornings to warm a canary. I was saying to him just yesterday, so I was, that a body who'll not see seventy again— What? Urgent, is it? All right, you hold onto your end and I'll go ask."

Mrs. Garvey bustled out of the study, but the Chief's question had preceded her

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down the hall and into the dining room, where Amos Ponsonby, Briarwood College's Professor of English emeritus, had already put down his napkin and risen to his feet.

"That's Chief Decker on the line," said Mrs. Garvey from the doorway, "and he wants to know—"

"The opening line of Act One, Scene Two of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*," finished Ponsonby. "As I've told you a thousand times, Mrs. Garvey, there is absolutely no need for you to shout into the telephone. The instrument is quite capable of transporting your normal voice wherever you wish it to go."

"And didn't my Billy, God rest his soul, say that very thing to me time and again, Professor? But when I got to thinking about Chief Decker way out there at Brindley's farm on the other side of town where he's calling from, I just couldn't help myself. Especially when there's like to be ice on the wires this time of year. It just seems a body ought to do what she can to help out."

Casting a despairing glance at the ceiling, Ponsonby left the table and hurried down the hall to his study. There he pulled his favorite one-volume Shakespeare from the shelf and located the significant line before picking up the phone.

"Phineas? Amos here. And the line you want is: *Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt.* But I must say that's a rather odd question for Briarwood's Chief of Police to be asking at 9:30 on a Monday morning. And so urgently, too. What the devil are you up to?"

Several moments passed before Ponsonby spoke again, and when he did, his voice reflected the seriousness of his friend's news. "Frank Brindley murdered? I'm sorry to hear it. I didn't know him well, but he always struck me as a very pleasant fellow. But what's a murder in an empty pasture got to do with a line from Shakespeare?"

Again Ponsonby paused attentively. Finally he said, "On the inside of a matchbook, you say? Just the word *Cymbeline* and the numbers one-two-one? No, I can't say it suggests anything to me offhand, although perhaps if I actually saw the matchbook—I don't suppose I could—? Of course it wouldn't be an imposition, Phineas. Not at all! Fine! I'll be waiting out front."

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And so it was that thirty minutes later, with Mrs. Garvey's statistics on the number of deaths attributable each year to wet feet still ringing in his mind, Professor Ponsonby stood in a snowy pasture on the southern outskirts of Briarwood, gazing down at the body of the late Frank Brindley. The murdered florist and gentleman-farmer lay sprawled on his back, his arms stretched wide, his mackinaw flung open to reveal a pale-blue shirt and a foot-wide crimson polkadot that had blossomed like a bull's-eye in the center of his chest.

Even more than the blood, however, it was the dead man's eyes, still open and staring at the sky, that disconcerted Ponsonby. Frank Brindley had regarded life through extremely thick-lensed glasses with black horn rims that had given him the appearance of a perpetually startled owl; now, in death, he seemed more surprised than ever, the thick lenses magnifying his eyes into round twin pools of disbelief.

As though he had glanced up just in time to see Death coming, reflected Ponsonby, turning away from the body and squinting his own eyes against the white glare of sun on snow. Beside him, Chief Decker gestured to the Sheriff's deputy who stood guard over the corpse to cover it again with a blanket.

The dead man lay in an unused pasture in a sparsely settled area of woods and fields, truck farms and nursery gardens, a mile south of the Briarwood city limits. Twenty-five feet away a crumbling rail fence marked the eastern boundary of the pasture; beyond it, a ten-foot embankment rose steeply to the old Post Highway, once the main thoroughfare between Briarwood and Clover City, but now seldom used except by the few farmers and nurserymen who lived along it. Ponsonby's old friend Phineas Decker, Chief of the Briarwood city police, also had jurisdiction over all capital crimes within Briarwood Township, and thus was in charge of investigating Brindley's murder.

"How much do you know about it so far?" asked Ponsonby as the two men began to pick their way back across the pasture to where a cluster of men and cars waited at the top of the embankment.

"Quite a bit," replied Chief Decker, "thanks to last night's

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snowfall, and the fact that it was one of the Sheriff's deputies who first spotted the body this morning, and he naturally knew enough not to mess up any of the existing tracks with his own.

"Also, I've already been up to the Brindley house—you can see the roof above the trees up there at the head of the valley—to break the news to his family and ask a few questions. Brindley left there about 7:15 this morning to go to his car—that brown Olds parked over there on the other side of the road—and then on into his florist shop.

"According to his family, he always set out for town about that time of morning, and in winter he always kept his car parked out beside the highway where it would be easier to dig out in case of a heavy snowfall overnight. He also was in the habit, if the snow wasn't too deep, of cutting across this pasture to get to his car.

"The killer must have known all that, because he'd obviously been waiting in ambush behind that big oak tree"—the Chief pointed to a bare-limbed giant astride a gentle rise a hundred yards to the west—"for quite some time. He both came and went alongside the pasture fence, but his tracks *in to* the tree were partially covered with snow, which means he must have reached the tree before it quit snowing, which was around 6:30 A.M. And yet Brindley didn't come along until about 7:20, which means the killer must have been waiting for almost an hour.

"Apparently he was a pretty good marksman, because he fired just one shot from a Remington 30.06, and as near as I can tell without moving the body, which I don't want to do till the coroner gets here, he caught Brindley just about dead center between the shoulder blades. The slug passed clear through his body and came out the center of his chest. That's the exit wound you saw; if you look closely you can see how the edges of his shirt and undershirt have been pushed out instead of in.

"Brindley must have instinctively twisted around in the instant before he fell to try to see who'd shot him, which is why he ended up on his back like that with his feet pointing toward the tree, even though his tracks made it obvious he was heading away from the tree when he was shot."

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The two men had reached the foot of the highway embankment, and Ponsonby, glad of an excuse to rest a moment, turned back to inspect their trail, which was visible only here and there. The entire pasture was crisscrossed with tracks, and the snow in a twenty-foot circle around the body was so well trampled it was impossible to deduce anything from the tracks.

Ponsonby frowned. "Just how certain are you, Phineas, of the accuracy of these surmises you've made on the basis of the tracks in the snow?"

"Dead certain, Amos. They've all been trampled over now, of course, but when we arrived this morning there weren't any tracks but Brindley's, the murderer's, and the deputy's, who made damn sure not to mess up the others. I put Sergeant Proudfoot on them before any of the rest of us made a move; he's the best goldarned tracker in the state and was able to read the snow like a book.

"No real evidence, mind you—nothing we could get a plaster cast of or use to identify the killer, but as far as telling what took place in this pasture, I'd stake my badge on the way Sam read it. Up on the highway now, that was a different matter; the wind had kept the highway pretty well swept clean, so we couldn't even tell if the killer had a car or not, let alone getting any traceable prints."

"Ah, yes," nodded Ponsonby. "I know Sam Proudfoot, and I've no doubt you're right. But as you were saying, Phineas, the killer fired just one shot—?"

"And hit Brindley square in the back," resumed the Chief. "My guess is he was dead almost by the time he hit the ground, although I'll know more about that when the coroner gets here. Doc Soule is on vacation, so I've had to send over to Clover City for the Mills County man who couldn't be located right off, which is why it's taking us so long to wrap things up."

Ponsonby paused, halfway up the embankment, frowning perplexedly. He waited a moment to regain his breath, then said, "But if Brindley was killed almost instantly, Phineas, then the word *Cymbeline* and the numbers in that matchbook could scarcely have been a dying message."

Chief Decker grinned sheep-

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ishly. "I never thought it was, Amos. I doubt if that matchbook has anything at all to do with Brindley's murder. You can still take a look at it if you like—it's up here beside my car with the other items from Brindley's pockets—but I don't think it'll tell you anything about the crime. But you've been helpful to me in solving one or two little puzzles in the past, and I thought you might enjoy seeing how a professional law-enforcement organization goes about solving a real honest-to-goodness murder. And that matchbook seemed like a good excuse to get you out here on a sort of semi-official basis."

"So kind of you to think of me," murmured Ponsonby.

"Not at all, Amos," replied the Chief airily. "Glad to have you. But as I was saying, after he'd shot Brindley, the killer retraced his path alongside the pasture fence back out to the highway, then walked up the highway about fifty feet, probably to make sure there was no traffic coming—you can see quite a distance in either direction from that particular point—and then made a beeline over to the body. He went through Brindley's pockets, turning everything out onto the snow, but as far as we can tell he didn't take anything but the money in Brindley's wallet, which according to Mrs. Brindley was somewhere around $570."

"Quite a sum," remarked Ponsonby.

"Friday night poker winnings he was taking to the bank," explained the Chief. "At any rate, after he'd robbed the corpse, the killer doubled back out to the highway and took off, although whether by foot or car we can't be sure."

"Because the snow hadn't remained on the highway surface sufficiently to give you any real tracks," observed Ponsonby. "But in that case, Phineas, how do you know that the man who went from the highway to the oak tree and back and the man who approached the body from some fifty feet farther up the road were one and the same?"

"I don't, not for certain. But it hardly seems likely that one man shot Brindley and somebody else robbed his body."

"Not likely perhaps," said Ponsonby, "but not impossible. And tell me one other thing: a few moments ago you mentioned the make of rifle the killer had used. But if the bullet passed clear through Brindley's body, how in the world do you know that?"

Chief Decker chortled. "I even know who it belongs to, Amos. It's a Remington 30.06

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that Porter Grannison, who lives on the next farm about half a mile south of here, reported stolen out of the back seat of his car yesterday morning. And the reason I know is because the killer very obligingly left it propped up against the tree before he took off."

"How very curious," murmured Ponsonby to himself. But after a moment he said aloud, "And yet when you think about it, Phineas, it makes sense. If the killer lay in ambush for Brindley, then the crime obviously was premeditated, and he very likely stole the rifle for just that purpose. And if he did, and knew it couldn't be traced to him, then obviously he'd want to be rid of it as soon after the murder as possible."

"Or even if it *could* be traced to him, but he figured he'd covered himself by reporting it stolen."

Ponsonby glanced inquiringly at the Chief. "Grannison?"

"He's one of my two leading suspects. He and Brindley haven't been any too friendly for years, and last Friday night their feud came to a head over a poker game at the country club. Brindley was the big winner, and Grannison accused him of cheating. It couldn't have been the money—Grannison has more now than he knows what to do with—but he's the kind of guy who just doesn't like to lose, especially to somebody he doesn't like. He couldn't prove his accusation and none of the other players would back him up, but they all heard him tell Brindley he'd get even with him, one way or another."

"But surely it would be a bit rash to make such a threat, then just three days later shoot the man one had threatened with one's own rifle?"

"Yes, but Porter Grannison's just the kind of cool, egotistical son-of-a-gun who might think he could get away with something like that. He'd report his rifle stolen, make sure nobody saw him commit the crime, rob the corpse to make it look like maybe the same thief who'd stolen his rifle had killed Brindley for his money, and then just calmly sit back and defy anyone to prove otherwise. He's that kind of guy—ice water for blood. Even talking to him is like talking to an iceberg because he goes around all the time in those godawful sunglasses that are mirrors on the outside, so you can't even look him in the eye when you're talking to him. Besides, as Brindley's closest neighbor, he could very well have known about Brindley's habit of crossing this pasture to get to his car every morning."

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"He does seem a likely prospect," said Ponsonby. "But tell me, Phineas—you mentioned *two* suspects. Who's the other one?"

"A young fellow by the name of Gary Kopek. Typical hippie type—long on hair, short on soap. According to Mrs. Brindley, he's been working around the farm here for the past two months, but last Thursday Brindley discovered Kopek had started a little marijuana garden in one corner of the greenhouse and gave him his walking papers. Then about 8:30 this morning a state trooper picked him up trying to hitch a ride just this side of Clover City, and when the trooper said he'd have to take him in and book him for hitchhiking on the freeway, Kopek tried to buy him off with a $500 bribe. Had the cash on him, too. I heard about it on my radio on my way out here: they're bringing him over now."

"And you think he may have killed Brindley to rob him?"

"Well, we know he was still hanging around town over the weekend, so he could have heard about Brindley's big Friday night poker winnings and figured Brindley'd be taking the money to the bank this morning, and he could have stolen Grannison's rifle out of his car yesterday morning. At any rate, I definitely want to ask him where he got that—oh, oh, speak of the devil."

"Kopek?" said Ponsonby, turning in the direction of the Chief's gaze.

"Grannison," said Decker, nodding at the bright red sports coupe that had pulled to a stop on the opposite shoulder of the road.

Porter Grannison was long and lean, with a narrow patrician face burdened with a perpetual sneer. His clothes—wine-colored blazer over white turtleneck jersey, blue-and-white-checked slacks, white loafers—were distinctive; but as Chief Decker had observed, it was the totally opaque sunglasses that struck the dominant note of his appearance. Looking into his mirror-shielded eyes, Ponsonby reflected, was as pointless as gazing into two empty eye sockets, and almost as chilling.

Grannison's greeting to the Chief was perfunctory, his handshake with Ponsonby no less so as he stared past them at the body of the late Frank Brindley, some twenty-five feet from the foot of the embankment. The body had once again been uncovered to allow the Briarwood police photographer to perform the photographer's time-honored rite of "just one more."

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"So that little punk finally bought it, did he?" observed Grannison dryly.

"You don't seem particularly surprised, Mr. Grannison," said Chief Decker.

"And should I be?"

"I think *I* would be. After all, it isn't every day a man comes across one of his neighbors lying dead in a pasture."

"The only surprising thing to me is that it didn't happen to him long ago. Brindley's been asking for somebody to put a bullet in him for as long as I've known him."

"Oh? And what makes you think he was shot?"

"Oh, come off it, Decker. I'm not blind and I'm not stupid. He's lying down there covered with blood and you've got the area around that big tree on the hill over there all roped off with one of your cops standing guard. Which sure as hell doesn't add up to a heart attack or a stabbing."

"And what would you say, Grannison," asked the Chief, obviously nettled, "if I told you he'd been shot with your rifle?"

"I'd say so what? It was stolen out of the back of my car yesterday morning. And I called your office and reported it as soon as I discovered it was gone."

"So I heard," observed the Chief. "I also heard you threatened Brindley in no uncertain terms at the country club last Friday night."

Grannison snorted derisively. "I threatened to *get* him, Decker, not shoot him. The day never dawned when I couldn't have taken that little punk with my two bare hands; I sure as hell didn't need to sneak up behind a tree and shoot him in the back. As a matter of fact, if he hadn't been such a little pipsqueak, I'd have cleaned up the floor with him right then and there when I caught him cheating. And now, unless you're going to arrest me, I'm going on into town."

"Just so you don't go any farther than that for a few days, Mr. Grannison."

Grannison laughed mockingly. "You sound like a scene right out of Perry Mason, Decker. But don't worry, I'm not about to start running, because I damn well haven't got anything to run *from*." He turned on his heel and strode back to his car.

"I almost hope the son-of-a-gun *did* do it," muttered the Chief. "And I ought to kick myself for tipping him off to where the shot was fired from by leaving the area around the tree roped off like that. So if you'll excuse me a moment, Amos, I'll get that cleared out before Kopek gets here."

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As Chief Decker hurried off to give instructions to his deputies, Ponsonby strolled over to the Chief's squad car, beside which a blanket had been spread on the ground to hold the various items that had been found scattered on the snow next to Brindley's body. With a nostalgic sigh for the days when he could have knelt beside them and regained his feet without assistance, Ponsonby leaned over to pick up and inspect each one in turn.

There was a well-worn leather wallet; a key chain containing half a dozen keys and a miniature golden horseshoe; a much-used pipe and tobacco pouch; a blue bandana-style handkerchief; a comb with several broken teeth; a pair of ordinary sunglasses on which one shaft had been broken and mended with a strip of adhesive tape; a well-chewed yellow pencil; the stubs of two raffle tickets for a drawing to be held at the Briarwood Volunteer Fireman's Annual Bazaar; three poker chips; a chapstick; a loose Band Aid; and two matchbooks, one inquiring if the reader had finished high school and suggesting how he might do so in his spare time, the other advertising the Chattsforth House Bar and Grill.

Ponsonby had left the two matchbooks till last. It was in the one from the Chattsforth House that he found it—the single word *Cymbeline* and, beneath it, the numbers 1-2-1.

" 'Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt,' " he murmured thoughtfully.

"What's that, Amos?" inquired Chief Decker, appearing suddenly at his elbow.

"Nothing, Phineas," replied Ponsonby absently. But a moment later he muttered to himself, "Unless—? I wonder."

"That must be Kopek," said the Chief, as a familiar green-and-white State Police car pulled to a stop across the highway.

The young man who extracted himself with obvious reluctance from the back seat wore straggly, shoulder-length hair, well-ventilated jeans, a faded khaki shirt, and a fatigue jacket that looked as if it had survived both World Wars. He squinted uncomfortably against the white glare of the snow as the state trooper led him over to where Ponsonby and the Chief were waiting. He stood before them, shifting awkwardly from one leg to the other, staring in the direction of the still-uncovered corpse.

"Oh, God!" he said, swallowing audibly. "It's him, ain't it? It's old man Brindley, and you think I done it."

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"Did what, son?" asked Chief Decker mildly.

"Shot him. I mean I guess that's what—with all that blood."

Chief Decker glanced at the state trooper. "Did you tell this young man anything about why you were bringing him here?"

"No, sir, not a word."

Decker turned back to the youth and briefly explained his rights under the law. "Are you willing to answer a few questions?" he asked.

"Sure I'm willin', but you ain't gonna believe me. You're gonna try to pin this on me whatever I say."

"That's not true, son. I'm not going to try to *pin* it on anyone. But a man's been murdered and it's my job to find out who did it. If it wasn't you, then you've got nothing to be afraid of." He paused. "I understand that when the officer picked you up this morning, you offered him $500 to let you go. May I ask how you came by the money?"

"I—I worked for it."

"Doing what?"

"Anything. Everything. I worked for old man Brindley."

"I know you did. For two months. But you didn't save $500 working for two months as a handyman."

"No. But there were other jobs. Before that, I mean. I been savin' it, man. I been savin' it for a couple years."

"And you were willing to surrender a couple of years' savings just to avoid an overnight bust for hitchhiking on the freeway?"

"Yeah. I mean no. I mean it was the idea of bein' cooped up. I can't stand it, man, even for one night. It blows my mind; I go right up the wall. So when I realized what I was facin' I just sort of flipped out, and the money di'n't mean nothin' no more."

"Were you in the service, son?" asked Chief Decker.

"Yeah. Vietnam. I got a honorable discharge, too; you can check on it."

"Pretty good with a rifle, were you?"

"No! I swear to God. I was a medic. A Corpsman. I hardly ever even carried a gun. I hate the damned things."

"You must have had to qualify with a rifle during your basic training?"

"Yeah, but I just squeaked by. I swear to God, I was lousy. And that was a couple years ago and after weeks of practise on the range. I'd be even worse now than I was then. Nowadays I couldn't hit the side of a barn, let alone a little guy like Brindley square in the back from all that distance."

"All *what* distance, Kopek?"

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"Wha'da ya mean?"

"How do you know the killer wasn't standing just a few feet behind Brindley when he fired?"

"Because—" Panic flashed in Kopek's eyes. "Because—"

A shiny black Cadillac pulled up behind the State Police car and discharged a short balding man who bustled toward them across the highway, his small black medical bag bouncing against his leg.

"—because if he'd been shot from up close," blurted Kopek, "you wouldn't be all that interested in what kind of a marksman I am!"

"All right, son," said Chief Decker. "You go wait in the back of that first squad car over there and as soon as the coroner's had a chance to look at the body you and I will go on into town and talk some more."

"Forgive me, Phineas," interjected Ponsonby hastily, "but while you're talking to the coroner I wonder if I might use your car radio and the good offices of your desk sergeant at the station to relay a question to a friend of mine in town? Something just occurred to me—"

"Go right ahead, Amos. Any one of my men can show you how. Meanwhile, I'll just go along with the doc."

It was fifteen minutes later and the body of the late Frank Brindley was at last being borne to a waiting ambulance when Chief Decker rejoined Ponsonby at the edge of the highway.

The Chief could not help but notice the self-satisfied smile with which his old friend welcomed him. "What the devil have you been up to, Amos? You look like the proverbial cat."

"A brilliant deduction, Phineas, though I say it myself."

"You don't mean to say you've solved it?"

"I believe I have. I began by assuming you were right about Brindley's having been killed almost instantly; the location of his wound made that seem highly probable even to my unprofessional eye. Accordingly, I ruled out any possibility that the word and numbers in the matchbook had been a hastily scrawled dying message.

"Next, I considered whether or not they might have been a message which Brindley had written earlier intending to pass on to someone else, or which someone else had written and passed on to him. I decided that, too, was unlikely, since outside of spy thrillers one would scarcely choose such an unlikely medium as the inside

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of a matchbook to send a message to someone else. The obvious deduction, then, was that the message had, indeed, been written *by* Brindley, but to himself rather than to someone else.

"My next question thus became: what sort of message is one most likely to write to oneself in such a haphazard fashion? And the answer, of course—I have done it myself a thousand times—is a simple reminder about something one wants to do and expects to be able to do shortly, and which thereafter one can discard.

"As for *what* it was that Brindley wished to remember, the raffle stubs and loose poker chips he had been carrying gave me a clue. From them I inferred that he had been something of a gambling man, and from that realization it was but a short step to identifying the sort of gambling to which his matchbook reminder most likely referred. Accordingly, I got in touch with a young friend of mine who works in the sports department at the *Briarwood Herald*, and sure enough, Phineas, there is a horse named *Cymbeline* running in the first race at Hamilton Park this afternoon, at odds, quoted in this morning's paper, of two to one.

"In short, Frank Brindley—who when it came to money matters apparently did not trust his memory—merely wished to remind himself of the details of a bet he intended to place when he got to town this morning, presumably after his favorite bookie had opened for business."

Having concluded his explanation, Ponsonby regarded Chief Decker with pleasurable expectancy.

But the Chief was anything but elated. "Confound it, Amos, I'm not concerned with a scribble in a matchbook!"

"But I thought it a rather clever piece of deduction," replied Ponsonby, crestfallen. "Especially for one who never in his life has placed a wager on a horse."

"I'm sure it was, Amos, and I don't mean to offend you, but when you said you'd solved it, I thought you meant you'd figured out which one of my two prime suspects had murdered Brindley."

Ponsonby regarded his old friend with surprise. "But surely that's been obvious, Phineas, ever since you completed your interrogation? I naturally assumed, from the clever way you drew them out—"

"Drew them out? What the devil are you talking about?" demanded the Chief. "I'd be

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willing to bet my next paycheck that one of that pair is guilty, but I'll be doggoned if I can see how anything I've learned so far can help me narrow it down to one or the other. I'd like to think it was Grannison, but when an itinerant hippie like Kopek turns up with more than $500 in his jeans I find it hard to believe he didn't steal it, especially when he can't explain—"

"Of course he stole it," interrupted Ponsonby testily. "His glasses are proof enough of that."

"His *glasses?*"

"The sunglasses you found lying next to Brindley's body. Since they were on top of the snow and there were only two sets of tracks, they either must have belonged to Brindley and been turned out of his pockets when he was searched, or they must have been dropped by the person who searched him.

"And it's highly unlikely they belonged to Brindley, since they would have been of absolutely no use to him. Anyone who has to wear glasses as thick as Brindley's is virtually blind without them, so that the only sunglasses which are of any use are either the kind with prescription lenses, or the kind that clip on over one's regular glasses. The logical conclusion, therefore, is that the ordinary pair of sunglasses you found belonged to the man who robbed Brindley, and fell out of his pocket when he was bending over to search the body.

"As to *who* that was, most unlikely it was Grannison, because, as you pointed out, the kind of mirror glasses he had on today are practically a trademark of his. Besides, Grannison is rather a dandy when it comes to dress, and those particular glasses, on which one shaft had been broken and then mended with a strip of adhesive tape, are entirely out of keeping with his appearance. Kopek, on the other hand, might very well have had—"

"A pair of sunglasses like that!" concluded the Chief enthusiastically. "By heaven, Amos, I think you've hit on something! Now if I can just turn up a witness or two who remembers having seen him wearing them, so I can prove they're his!"

"I scarcely think that will be necessary, Phineas," said Ponsonby. "Simply point out to the lad that admitting he robbed Brindley's corpse, however reprehensible, will still be his best defense against the charge of murder."

"His best—?" Chief Decker gaped. "But you just said he was guilty!"

"Of *robbing* Brindley, Phi-

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neas, not of murdering him. No, indeed, Porter Grannison's your murderer. My guess is that when he got back to the highway after having shot Brindley, he saw Kopek coming along in the distance—probably hiking over to the Clover City freeway—and waited in that grove of trees by the corner of the pasture until the lad had spotted the body, had searched it to see if there was anything worth stealing, and then had hightailed it out of here. All of which, of course, fitted in perfectly with Grannison's scheme. Otherwise Grannison almost certainly would have robbed the body himself, to make Brindley's death look like a murder-for-gain rather than a murder-for-revenge, which it was."

"But if Kopek robbed the body, what makes you so certain it was Grannison who killed him?"

"By the simple process of elimination, Phineas. Consider a moment: both men joined us here this morning supposedly without knowing anything at all about the crime. And what did they see? They saw a pasture which by then was so well trampled it couldn't possibly have told them anything about what had taken place, and they saw Frank Brindley lying on his back, his chest covered with blood and his feet pointing away from the road, in the direction from which the shot had been fired. Or at least Grannison was able to deduce as much; as far as Kopek knew, the shot could have come from any direction.

"Now the obvious conclusion to be drawn from that scene by a neighbor or former employee of Brindley's would be either that he had been shot last evening on his way *from* his car *to* his house—since it was impossible to tell from this distance how stiff his body was—or that he had been shot this morning on his way *to* his car *from* his house, but if so, that he had been hailed from behind and had turned to face his assailant before being hit. Because, of course, every shred of visible evidence available to either Grannison or Kopek indicated that Brindley had been shot *in the chest.*

"And yet both of them knew, without being told, that Brindley had actually been shot in the back! Grannison said something about not having to sneak up behind a tree and shoot him in the back, and

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Kopek swore he couldn't hit the side of a barn, let alone hit a little fellow like Brindley square in the back.

"Grannison was the first to make that slip, and I was immediately convinced of his guilt. But when Kopek came along and made the same mistake, I was faced with a dilemma. Assuming the obvious—that one of them knew Brindley had been hit in the back because he had fired the shot—how could the other have known?

"As I saw it, there were just three possibilities. One, they could have committed or at least plotted the crime together. Yet the idea of Grannison linking up with or even hiring an itinerant hippie like Kopek to kill Brindley struck me as being totally unlikely, and the idea of Kopek hiring Grannison was even more ludicrous.

"Second, one of them might have been a chance witness to the crime. But in that case, since neither man had any reason to protect the other, and since each one obviously knew himself to be a leading suspect, he surely would have been only too eager to tell you what he had seen.

"Third—and this seemed to me most likely—the one who had *not* killed Brindley might nevertheless have discovered that Brindley had been shot in the back by having approached the body. He might have hoisted it up to reach into the rear trouser pocket, for instance, and so seen the blood on the snow beneath. Or in Kopek's case, his experience as a medic in Vietnam might have enabled him to recognize Brindley's chest wound as an exit wound.

"But in any event, the assumption that one man *shot* Brindley and the other *robbed his corpse* is the most logical explanation of how *both* could have known he had been shot in the back. In which case, your having found Kopek's sunglasses next to the body establishes Kopek as the robber—"

"—and Grannison as the murderer!" concluded the Chief. "By thunder, Amos, I *knew* it had to be him!"

Ponsonby smiled. "Of course you did, Phineas," he said softly.

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a *NEW* crime story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

William Bankier is a versatile writer, with an imagination that roams far and wide in the territory of creative ideas. No two stories by Mr. Bankier are remotely alike; so it is no surprise that his newest story is different from all his previous appearances in EQMM. Nor is it any surprise that, as before, there is "something extra" . . .

MY BROTHER'S KILLER

by WILLIAM BANKIER

There wasn't much for me to do around the dry-cleaning shop. There never is. Once in a while, when I've just come back from a hit out of town, I drop by and pick up the bank book and take it over to the bank where I deposit the $5,000, which is what they usually pay me, to the credit of the shop's current account. It's what Vince Angelino calls "washing the money." But apart from that, the two girls I've hired to run the place do it all. Mainly I look in to establish that the shop is mine, because that's the whole idea—a legitimate "cover." But the little hole in the wall depresses me, the way most things have for the past year, so I soon get out of there.

On this day I walked up the street to the Cherub Bar and started the treatment. A little early this afternoon; it was only three o clock. The treatment has been going on as long as the depression. It consists of drinking a lot of whiskey and looking at the young girls swaying and nodding to the loud rock music until I begin to feel the way I used to. It takes me about an hour.

I don't get involved with these kids. All I do is stare and eventually smile a bit and then turn back to my drink. It's a young bar, but they're getting used to this fat old guy with the red face who comes in and

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perches on the end stool.

"Same again, Mr. Regan?"

"Same again, Dallas."

He looks like no other bartender I've ever seen. His shoulder-length hair is held back by an Indian headband. They tell me he's a small-town boy and he took the name of Dallas so we'd never forget what happened to John F. Kennedy. Maybe that's why I like him. I'm a small-town boy, too, and Regan isn't my real name either.

I've never really liked my life. There was a time, though, when I didn't mind it. There was excitement. The trip to a strange city was always a lift; like a pro-ball player I was always off to Chicago or L.A. And I do what I do because if it isn't me, somebody else would do it. You can't change the world.

But now I have to fight my way up every day. Is this what it means to be 45 years old? If it wasn't for the booze and the girls to look at I swear I'd go home and put the muzzle of that automatic in my mouth.

By eight o'clock I had eaten half of the good steak the management sells cheap to make sure we stay there and keep drinking. Which I fully intended to do. When out of the crowd came a tall good-looking man, peering at me under the flat of his hand like a frontier scout.

"It is, it is!" he said. "It's my big brother, Ross!"

I grabbed his hand. He felt good. "Alex, what are you doing in town?"

Looking at my brother after all these years, I felt a surge of warmth in my chest. Part of me wanted to grab him and hold onto him, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. Vince Angelino and his crowd are always kissing their brothers, but Alex and I weren't brought up that way. Still, the feeling was in me, and I think I saw it in his eyes, too.

"It's the Congress of Suburban Mayors. You knew I was elected Mayor of Clearwater last year, didn't you?"

"No. Congratulations. When you moved to the big city you really made it, eh?"

"Clearwater's just a suburban community. But yes, it's important. A lot of money lives there. A lot of power."

I ordered drinks and Dallas brought them.

"There you are, Mr. Regan."

"Regan?" Alex said. "No wonder I couldn't find you in the phone book. What's the matter with Cumberland?"

"It's a business thing. I'll explain later. How the hell are you? You look great, really great."

It was after nine when we

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decided to get in a game of snooker pool. Just like the old days. There was a place with tables down the street and I took my brother there.

How quickly the years fell away. Standing in the shadows around the table, or leaning into the bright light close to the brilliantly colored balls on the rich green surface, we found conversation unnecessary and replaced it with the calm, simple statements of the game.

"Blue in the side."

"Twice across."

"In off the pink."

And there were the old comedy lines, made more precious by years of repetition.

"This table leaks."

"Sold the farm."

It was as though we were back in Baytown, at Lafferty's Poolroom, having a quick game after school. I could almost imagine we'd finish the game, hurry home for supper, then head down to the church for choir practise.

I found myself humming our favorite hymn, the Welsh tune, *Aberystwyth*.

> "Jesu, lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom
> fly . . . "

Alex straightened and we stood facing each other, unself-conscious, me singing the melody while he did the tenor part. We kept our voices down, not to disturb the few others in the pool room, but it didn't matter to us anyway. This was serious; we were re-living our past.

> "Safe into the haven guide,
> Oh, receive my soul at last."

I was disappointed to learn, as we walked from the poolroom to Alex's hotel, that my brother had given up going to church. The subject flowed naturally from our memories of the choir.

"It used to be important for a politician to be seen regularly in church," he said. "But not so much any more. I just show up at Christmas and Easter."

"I go every week. Even when I'm out of town."

We were passing under a street light and I saw Alex's faint smile. It's remarkable how a guy can change. We both used to care about God. Now I still do, but he doesn't. I feel very definitely that a Supreme Being orders our lives and that we are accountable to Him at the end.

You might think that strange, considering the kind of work I do. But what I do is right. I never accept a contract until Vince Angelino tells me why the man has it coming. In a way I am doing His work by punishing the wicked here on earth.

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Alex and I bought some food and took it up to his hotel room and ate it, watching a late movie on television. An old Laurel and Hardy film which I'm sure we saw together at the Belle Theatre on its first run. A movie cost us ten or twelve cents in those days, I don't remember which, and we always went on Saturday afternoons.

Now, sitting in front of the TV screen with a sandwich in my hand and my little brother in the dark beside me, it was like being home. I could imagine my mother, who didn't like television, sitting alone in the kitchen, chain-smoking, and yelling out, "When is that thing finished?"

I left late with a promise to call Alex after his meetings the next afternoon so we could do it all again tomorrow night.

In the morning I was awake and shaving before it got through to me. My depression was gone. Maybe I should consider moving to Clearwater so I could spend more time with my brother. That's my problem—being too much alone. I'm a family boy at heart. Of course, I knew it would never happen. They would never allow me to leave town. They need me.

On my way to get breakfast I stopped at the newsstand on Eagle Street to pick up a paper. It was a beautiful sunny day and Davey's voice rang out on the warm air.

"Morniiiiing Gazette!"

I got in the stand with him just out of habit. Whenever I have time, I stay in there with old Davey. It's like visiting his home. He expects me to come in.

There was just room inside for me to open the tabloid to the sports section. I helped myself to a doughnut; Davey always has a bag of jelly doughnuts in there.

"See Hank Aaron hit another one."

"Yeah. He'll catch Babe Ruth."

"Think so? I don't think so."

People came by and put dimes on Davey's tray and he pushed out papers to them.

"Say. Know who I saw getting off the train this morning? Kosk."

My ears pricked up as Davey knew they would. There are only a few specialists in my business and we know each other by reputation. Kosk comes in from Cleveland once in a while to do a contract here. I never work in my own town just as Kosk never works in Cleveland.

"I wonder what he's here for?" Davey asked. Davey is the

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only man in the world who knows what I do. Besides Angelino. Davey doesn't really know, he suspects. I live with it because I know the police could burn him and he'd never squawk.

I shrugged and turned the page. But I was really curious. So I went and had coffee and then telephoned Vince Angelino. It's never easy getting through to Vince. He had to call me back on another phone because he's scared of wiretaps and I suppose he's right. I told him what I had heard and insisted I wanted to know more. Because Vince was a little coy.

Finally he said, "Okay. It's a politician who won't cooperate. One of those mayors here for the conference. He's making it very hard for the organization in Clearwater. We've tried to talk to him but he refuses to listen. So . . ."

I felt very cold all of a sudden. "What's this guy's name?"

"Cumberland. Alex Cumberland."

I went and sat in back of the dry-cleaning shop and thought about what I should do. If I warned Alex, he wouldn't believe me. To convince him I'd have to prove I am what I am. I can't do that. He thinks I'm a legitimate businessman and I want to keep it that way.

Even if he did believe me, what could he do? The police can't protect him. Not against Kosk. And if he went back to Clearwater, Kosk would follow him.

The only thing would be for Alex to stop holding out. Contact the organization and say he'll go along. But I knew Alex would never do that.

I used to resent my little brother sometimes, but at the same time, I was proud of him. Right was right to Alex. He wouldn't cheat on an exam. He wouldn't take things out of stores. We all did, but he wouldn't. He was like a model of what the rest of us should be and though we couldn't measure up, we needed him as a comparison.

I believe God puts people like that among us. If you know my brother Alex, you can't say the human race is naturally bad.

When I had thought it all over, it seemed clear what I had to do. I went back to Davey's newsstand and asked him a question. Yes, he had kept an eye on Kosk. He had gone to a roominghouse on Arbour Avenue. Not far from Alex's hotel, I thought.

I went and stood on the corner of Arbour where I could see the roominghouse door. It was a long wait. I used the time

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to improve the suntan on my face. I look better in the mirror behind the Cherub Bar when my face is tanned.

It was mid-afternoon when Kosk came out of the rooming-house. He had been pointed out to me once before, years ago. As I had suspected, he started walking in the direction of Alex's hotel. I kept a block between us, only hurrying when he turned into the hotel entrance.

Inside the lobby I saw him on the house phone. He didn't speak, so I figured he was checking Alex's room and found it empty. When Kosk went to the elevators I hit the stairs. Alex's room was on the third floor, close enough for me to be there first.

In the corridor I waited around a corner. I heard the elevator door open and close. Footsteps on the carpet. Then a familiar sound. I glanced down the hall. Kosk was using a plastic strip to force the lock and get into Alex's room.

When he was inside, I took a chance. I had to. I went to the room next door and rapped lightly. Again. No response. I was lucky. Taking out a credit card, I did the same job Kosk had done on Alex's lock.

Inside I went to the window. A full-length glass door slid open to let me out onto the narrow balcony. I had looked out Alex's window last night and had seen the rows of balconies connecting room to room. I had left his open then. As I climbed the rail dividing the balconies, I hoped he hadn't closed it.

Again I was lucky. Not only was the glass door unlocked, it was open a couple of feet, the floor-length drapes billowing slightly into the room. I was not sure where Kosk would be, but I had a hunch. I peered past the drape and saw I was right. He was on his belly on the floor behind the bed, facing the door and with his back to me.

I came in quietly. He saw the movement of a shadow on the floor, turned, and saw my gun aimed at his head. The silencer on the barrel told him a lot.

"You ain't a cop."

I shook my head.

"Then you must be— But listen, this is an official job. If you're local, you must know Angelino. He put out the contract."

At close range Kosk turned out to be an ordinary little guy. His suit was cheap and I could smell his perspiration. His glasses had been broken and one shaft was held together by adhesive tape.

"Have you got something against me?" he asked.

I shook my head again.

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"Then you must be protecting Cumberland. Okay. You've done it. Just let me walk out of here."

I said, "Angelino would never let you walk away. He's paid you for the hit. You'd have to follow him back to Clearwater." Without expecting to I said, "I can't protect my brother everywhere."

"Your brother? Does Angelino know that? Talk to him. Talk to your brother. I don't know what the problem is, but can't you work it out?"

There was a key in the door. It opened quickly and the lights snapped on. It was Alex, a brief case in his hand. He wasn't stupid, my brother. He stayed cool. Closing the door, he moved slowly to where he could see Kosk lying on the floor.

"Ross, what is this?"

"This guy was waiting to kill you. I found out."

"How did you find out? And how come you have a gun?"

Kosk was looking desperate. And crafty, with a witness in the room. He stood up. "This is all a mistake. I'm getting out of here."

I leveled the gun. "Stand still."

Alex yelled, "Ross, stop!"

"He's a hired gun," I yelled back. "There's a contract out on you."

My brother turned to Kosk and smiled. "Oh, I see. The syndicate. The police reorganization I'm bringing in. Yes. And it may spread if I keep pushing it." He turned back to me. "But I still don't see your involvement."

Kosk said, "Your brother is a hired gun, too. There's no other way he could know about me."

"Is that true, Ross?"

I didn't say anything.

There was an expression on Alex's face I had never seen before. Cold and hard. "All right. I don't need mob protection to survive. The first thing I do is call the police." He went to the phone.

Kosk glanced at me. I said, "Don't do that, Alex."

"Why not?"

"There's too much happening here. I'm involved. No police."

Alex looked straight at me and I saw the simplicity of the situation in his eyes. Men with unlicensed guns are against the law. Police must be called. There is right and there is wrong.

"I have to call them, Ross." His voice was quiet. "You know that."

"Kosk," I said. "Take the phone from him."

Kosk snatched the phone from Alex's hand. For good

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measure he tore the wire out of the wall.

"Then I'll go and call from the desk." Alex turned. "This whole thing has to stop right here."

As he walked to the door I felt a helpless rage boiling up inside me. It seemed to come from deep down and from years ago. You couldn't tell him anything. You couldn't reason with him. Bloody, sanctimonious, holier-than-thou—

The gun popped twice, then again. Alex put his hands against the door, leaning there, supporting himself, then his knees bent and he slid to the floor.

Kosk was looking at me, wild-eyed. He expected the worst. When he saw nothing else was going to happen, he quickly stepped across Alex's body, opened the door, and was gone.

Now I am sitting at the Cherub Bar, trying to deal with the voice in my head. I have had three drinks, doubles, and still the rage inside me goes on.

"Are you all right, Mr. Regan?"

"I'm fine, Dallas."

'You sure?"

"It's okay. I'm all right."

The question is, what to do? I know now who killed my brother. It was Kosk. He came here from Cleveland with a gun and he murdered him. Alex did not deserve to die. He was a good man. He always did right and there was no wickedness in him.

I know what I will do. I will go to Cleveland knowing that my enemy can be found there. And in time I will find him.

Then, as the instrument of God's justice, I shall confront Kosk. And the guilty shall be punished.

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a *NEW* Gideon story by

J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

first publication in the United States

Continuing the new series about Commander George Gideon, Chief of the C.I.D. (the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard)... A crime can have an intensely personal significance in the local Divisional Police Headquarters, especially when a detective like Gideon takes over. Gideon has head and heart...

GIDEON AND THE INSIDE JOB

by J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

"What am I going to do?" Detective Constable David Owen muttered to himself. "What am I going to do?"

He stared down at the open drawer, and at the conglomeration of penknives, fountain pens, wallets, erasers, pens, pencils, and typewriter ribbons which filled it—a hundred times as much as one would expect to find in any schoolboy's bedroom. There was enough stationery here to stock a small shop. There were postage stamps, too, and a bundle of blank money orders.

Owen knew that all these had been stolen. He had seen the memo about the theft from a post office and stationery shop only two days before. Since then a single sentence from the memo had pounded unceasingly through his brain: *This is the third theft from the same shop, near Chichester Street School, in the past two months.*

Jonathan, his fourteen-year-old brother, attended Chichester Street School, and Jonathan had been much freer with money lately. That was what had made David Owen curious.

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The boy had always had a tendency to try to get easy money, and Owen had suspected some form of gambling.

Suddenly he heard the front door slam, heard Jonathan's whistle.

What should he do? Wait here and confront the boy? If he forced the issue now, he might be in time to return the stolen goods.

Nonsense. The crime had already been committed, and he, an officer of the C.I.D.—Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police—knew about it; this was not a matter that could be covered up.

Wasn't this as good a time as any to tackle Jonathan?—when their parents were on holiday on the Continent. He heard the door of the pantry open and close; Jonathan, unaware of any danger, must be helping himself to cake or biscuits.

There was only one time to face up to a problem like this—now, straightaway.

But what a dreadful shock it would be for Mum and Dad! It would cut short their holiday and bring them hurrying back from Italy. Perhaps it would, after all, be better to wait until after they returned.

Jonathan's footsteps sounded across the kitchen, then along the passage. Detective David Owen slipped out of the tiny bedroom and across to his own, catching a glimpse of Jonathan's fair, curly hair as the boy came whistling up the stairs. David stepped quickly into his room, then turned and came out onto the landing. The younger brother's eyes lit up.

"Hi, David!"

"Hello, Jon. You're home early."

"The ground was too wet to play tennis, so they've given us extra homework instead." Jonathan grimaced. He had the face of an angel, but David knew, deep in his heart, that his younger brother could be a ready liar, sometimes seeming to have no moral sense. It was a knowledge David fought against.

The boy looked up at him. "You going out tonight?"

"I'm on duty in an hour's time," David said. "You'll be all right, won't you?"

"I'm not afraid of any old burglar!" Jonathan laughed. "No need to worry about *me*. I've put the kettle on—it ought to be boiling soon. Did you get that cream cake?"

"It's in the pantry," David said.

His brother must surely have seen it; that was the kind of little lie he often told—or implied. But *had* he seen it? Was he, David, taking all this too

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seriously? Could he even be mistaken about the stationery and the money? He went downstairs and made tea, Jonathan following him a few moments later.

"I simply don't know what to do," David Owen told himself miserably.

He decided, at last, to do nothing; but even as he convinced himself that it would be best to wait until after his parents came home, he knew this was the wrong decision.

The problem troubled him deeply as he went along to the local Divisional Police Headquarters. It was a quiet evening, and he had too much time in which to brood. He was still brooding when the night-duty Superintendent sent for him.

"Owen," his chief said, "I have a most unpleasant duty. Acting on certain information I arranged for two of our men to visit your house tonight. You don't need to be told what they found, do you?"

David Owen was too appalled to say anything.

Just after nine o'clock the next morning Commander George Gideon, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard, arrived at his office and was immediately aware of tension. Something very unusual must have happened, he thought to himself. This big rugged-looking man with the iron-gray hair and penetrating gray eyes was as sensitive to atmosphere as any woman.

His chief aide, Superintendent Lemaitre, a tall, thin, somewhat brash man, did his best to pretend that everything was normal.

"Cut out the bright stuff, Lem," said Gideon, sitting down at his desk. "What's happened?"

"You're not going to like it," Lemaitre warned.

Gideon held his patience. "Try me."

"Right. You remember the post office jobs where the money and stamps were stolen along with the money orders? Been three jobs altogether."

"I remember," Gideon said, frowning, for such a comparatively minor crime was hardly calculated to upset him. "What about it?"

"We've got the chap who did it."

"Good. What's so unusual about that?"

"It's one of our chaps," Lemaitre announced brusquely.

Gideon frowned more deeply, as if he did not fully understand the significance of the statement. All at once he sat back in his chair, alarm driving all other emotion away. "One

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of *our* chaps? Are you sure?"

"No doubt at all. His fingerprints were found on a lot of the stuff. It was hidden in his kid brother's bedroom. We do find 'em, don't we? He not only ruined his career and got himself a prison sentence, he tried to make it look like his own flesh and blood. No need to waste any sympathy there, George."

"No," said Gideon heavily. "That's the last thing I'd do. But I want to see him. Where is he?"

"I thought you'd want to tear a strip off him yourself," said Lemaitre. "He's downstairs, in the waiting room."

"Let me see the case report, and when I ring, send him straight in," Gideon said.

"The report's on your desk," Lemaitre told him. "Entry through a fanlight, and a hundred pounds in cash missing. A hell of a lot of postage stamps and money orders taken, too."

Gideon studied the papers in the file, then rang the bell, and a few minutes later Detective David Owen came into the office. Lemaitre, who had brought him in, went out and shut the door. Gideon, still sitting at his desk, stared up at Owen for several minutes without speaking.

Owen did not shift his gaze, but his color heightened. The windows, closed against a high wind, kept out most of the sound from the Embankment.

At last Gideon spoke.

"Why?" he demanded explosively.

Owen said, "Saving up to get married, sir."

"Your fiancée won't exactly enjoy this, will she?"

"No, sir."

"Why select that particular post office?" demanded Gideon.

"It—it's fairly secluded, sir. I thought it would be easy."

"And was it, eh?" Gideon sounded tired. "How did you go about it?"

"I thought—" Owen broke off. "I don't have to incriminate myself to you, sir, do I?"

"No. It won't do you any harm to tell the truth, though."

"I think I would like legal advice before saying anything," Owen said unhappily. "Sorry if I seem unhelpful, sir."

"Unhelpful?" barked Gideon. "Your whole future is at stake, the good name of the Metropolitan Police is at stake, and you bleat about being unhelpful." Owen became more and more pale under this angry attack. "Have any help?" Gideon demanded abruptly.

"Help?"

"Yes, *help*. Or did you perform this remarkable feat entirely alone?"

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"I did it alone, sir."

Gideon stared at him for a long time, then pressed the bell once more. Lemaitre appeared at the door.

"The report states that young Jonathan Owen has also been brought in for questioning," said Gideon. "Send him in."

"No!" gasped David Owen. "No, please, I—"

"Be quiet!" commanded Gideon, and it seemed to Lemaitre, hurrying to do Gideon's bidding, that he had never seen his chief so angry.

As they waited, Gideon leaned back in his chair, one arm outstretched, fingers beating a noiseless tattoo on the shiny surface of his desk. David Owen stood stiffly at attention, his eyes fixed on the wall behind Gideon's head. Neither man spoke.

At last the door opened and young Jonathan came in. There was an unmistakable air of suppressed excitement about the boy, who looked fresh-eyed, tousle-haired, and had an eager expression even when he stared at his brother.

David said gruffly, "Hello, Jon."

"Hi!" said Jonathan.

"This is—pretty bad," David said. "I didn't—I didn't want—" He stopped, looking with almost desperate appeal at his brother, whose eyes became brighter and more rounded.

"Haven't you anything to say, Jonathan?" demanded Gideon.

"What *is* there to say, sir?" asked Jonathan. "I don't know anything about the robbery, if that's what you mean."

David Owen gasped as if attacked by sudden pain; but he said nothing. Gideon looked at them both in turn, then picked up the file in front of him. He slapped it heavily against the desk.

"Jonathan, you're lying. *You* broke into that post office. *You* hid the loot. *You* kept quiet when suspicion fell on your brother. Silence!" he roared, as the boy began to interrupt. "Don't argue with me! *You* did it."

"You can't be sure!" cried Jonathan Owen, his gaiety now replaced by fear.

"I can be sure all right."

"No, you can't! If David says it was me he's a liar. He—"

"The burglar got in by a fanlight which was far too small for your brother," Gideon interrupted in a hard hostile voice. "You're not playing games, now, Jonathan, you're in trouble."

There was a long pause. Then the boy burst out, "I'm too young, you can't do anything to me, I'm too young!"

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"You'll be surprised at what we can do to you," Gideon said, pressing the bell again. When Lemaitre came in, Gideon ordered harshly, "Charge this boy with the post office burglaries. Take a statement and arrange for the juvenile court hearing. And get a move on." He did not smile at Lemaitre's thunderstruck expression, and Lemaitre grabbed the boy and ducked out.

Gideon glowered at Owen.

"So you're a self-sacrificing hero," he growled. "To protect your little brother you'll ruin your life and start a whole stream of rumors about corrupt policemen—good God, Owen, why did you do it? Didn't you *know* we could deal with it quietly *and* give him the chance to straighten himself out?"

David Owen was standing very still.

"I knew, sir."

"Then why the devil make a martyr out of yourself?"

David moistened his lips.

"I—I've been worried about my brother for some time, sir. I know I should have reported this the moment I saw the stuff in his room, but—well, I kept hoping there was some explanation. Our parents are away on holiday, so they couldn't help—and he *is* only a child, sir. I don't think he realizes—"

"Not so much of a child that he doesn't know the difference between right and wrong," interrupted Gideon. "And if he's old enough to steal, he's old enough to take his punishment. Well, if anything can straighten the boy out, this can." He frowned. "And let me straighten *you* out, Owen. A policeman has no room for sentiment. He has a job to do, and all he must worry about is doing it. And a man has a duty to society and to himself. You could have harmed Jonathan more than you helped him. Understood?"

Slowly, painfully, gratefully, David Owen said, "Understood, sir. Thank you."

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a NEW Van der Valk story by

NICOLAS FREELING

first publication in the United States

Continuing the new series of vignettes about the Amsterdam detective, Van der Valk . . . "Routine police detail"—in capsule form: Van der Valk had to deal with all kinds of criminals—even with odd ones like the man who had escaped from the hospital. And like his counterpart in London, Van der Valk has head and heart . . .

VAN DER VALK AND THE TRAIN WATCHER

by NICOLAS FREELING

Routine police detail, the kind that arrives daily: A man under treatment in a hospital for some unimportant infection vanished—just by walking out of the door when nobody was paying attention. He hadn't returned home, hadn't been seen.

The story reached the criminal brigade the next day because the man's description seemed to link with that of the perpetrator of a series of shop holdups—man with a scarf round the face who pointed a gun and emptied the till. Van der Valk went to the hospital and questioned the intern.

"We thought there might be something wrong with his kidneys—we were running various tests—all negative. One of those excitable fellows, thinking himself dead for no reason—morbid, you know; irritable with nurses and so on. And then he just ups and leaves—annoying. These neurotic ones always are annoying."

"So there was nothing wrong

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with him?" asked Van der Valk.

"Nothing at all—we're sure of that."

"Hospitals," Van der Valk said at dinner, only half joking. "Too self-satisfied to see that it's their fault. Push you about, treat you as a baby—worse, as something subhuman. Fellow's a bit neurotic, convinced he's got an incurable disease and they're not telling him—and they just won't take five minutes to sit down and explain. 'No time, no time'—they're sitting around drinking coffee and gossiping half the morning. I think it likely that just *being* in a hospital could produce a temporary psychotic state. Pain, fatigue, depression, worry—and being treated like that. Fellow could very well get suicidal."

He had all information about the man that trickled to him centralized. Half the trouble with the police is that it is just like a hospital: one had to coordinate a dozen different departments—radiology and pathology, histologic this and serologic that; half the time five minutes of common-sense thinking could save a week's work.

"Pharmacist reports odd behavior of man in dark blue suit."

"Mine says light gray suit."

"Different man—or he bought another suit."

"All pharmacists report people behaving oddly," said Van der Valk patiently, "all the time."

"Could be any of three different autos, all reported missing round the same time."

"Can't make out where he got the gun."

"Damn it, she's the perfect eyewitness. Standing right opposite him when he pointed it at her."

"Put your trust in eyewitnesses!" groaned Van der Valk.

"Man behaving in peculiar way by railway bridge," said the telephone operator. "Fits description. They're watching him but hesitate to approach. Any instructions?"

"Probably just a chap who likes trains."

"Auto parked the other side of the bridge, gray Ford, number checks."

"Which one?"

"The one missing outside the drug store."

"Aha! Very well, I'll come myself. Tell them on no account to approach or disturb him."

The railway footbridge, a narrow affair with many steps, was not used by many people, but workmen crossed every now and then, whistling and unhurried, showing no concern for a man watching trains,

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which is a common enough phenomenon. Van der Valk, watching through binoculars, saw that the man shrank into the angle of the railing and watched till the passers had vanished down the steps. There were at least a dozen railway tracks, and the long narrow bridge was not easy to approach.

"Our customer all right."

"What about the gun, though?"

"It's a toy," said Van der Valk patiently.

"How can you be sure?"

"He's gone there to think suicidal thoughts, and if he had a real gun he wouldn't need a railway bridge."

Still, he had to be cautious; even if there was no train coming, the thirty-foot drop onto steel rails could kill anybody.

Van der Valk walked up the steps and started to cross, his footsteps sounding loud and hollow. The man was taking him in carefully, out of the corner of his eye. Van der Valk stopped ten paces off, leaned his arms on the guard rail, and lost himself in contemplation of a modern railway system. It was attractive from this perspective—like a layout in an expensive toyshop. He said so, laughing as though a bit ashamed of sounding so childish; but the man was too frightened.

"Who are you?" the man said bluntly, as though Van der Valk were a new nurse with still another hypodermic syringe.

"Me?—just an ordinary fellow, same as you. Who are you, anyhow? I like trains—do you?"

"You're not a doctor?"

"No."

"Psychiatrist or something?"

"I should bloody well hope not," Van der Valk said stoutly. He came nearer, rashly, and instantly the hand in the man's pocket poked at him.

"Don't come a step nearer—unless you want a bullet in your gut."

"Can't have that, you know," Van der Valk said in a complaining voice, walking on.

"Stop!" the man said fiercely.

"Now, pinching autos is not done, you know. Better give me the key."

"You're a policeman!"

"Of course," Van der Valk said, astonished. "What did you think I was?"

"I'll shoot, you fool. I don't care—I've only a month or two to live."

"You don't want to listen to those idiot doctors—you're as healthy and normal as I am. I ought to know—I'm the detective."

The man went suddenly

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limp. Van der Valk took his arm and steered him back toward the parked auto. The man surrendered the key obediently and they both got in. The glove compartment was stuffed with a dozen different kinds of pills, a real squirrel's hoard.

"Pack of worthless rubbish." Van der Valk got out and threw the lot on the railway line: it did the trick. The man had forgotten all about the pistol and when, on the way back to the office, he held it impulsively out to Van der Valk, the detective took it negligently. It was an American Army Colt .38, with a fully loaded magazine.

Van der Valk almost laughed. People who needed—or thought they needed—that amount of pills were never satisfied with less than two or three different ways of killing themselves!

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Summerton, Margaret	THE GHOST FLOWERS	Doubleday & Co.	4.95	4/13

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This is the 383rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a strange story, as you will see . . .

The author, Jimmie L. Nelson, is in his mid-twenties, single, and at the time of this writing, planning to attend Mesa College, San Diego, California, as a pre-med student. His hobbies are mostly outdoor sports—and writing . . .

THE CAPTIVE

by JIMMIE L. NELSON

I haven't slept in days, maybe in weeks. I've lost all concept of time. My waking hours are spent pacing up and down this twelve-by-twelve chamber of horrors, this cage of the damned. Why couldn't they have just killed me, put a bullet in my head? At least that would show some form of decency, of humanity. But no, for the rest of my life I have nothing but four walls and barred windows to look forward to.

It's a nightmare, a living nightmare out of which no one ever awakens. I've tried to understand it, but I can't. What have I done, what laws of mankind have I broken to warrant this solitary confinement?

It seems so very long ago that I was happy. Certainly we had problems, maybe more than most, but she stood by me all the way. Then came the baby and more problems, but we were in love and would have overcome all obstacles.

Then it happened. I was out for a walk as was my custom after dinner. The sun was shining on my face and the wind was blowing through my hair. I was tired, I'd had a long hard day, and shortly would return home for a leisurely evening with my family. The events that followed are even now vague in my memory.

Suddenly I felt a piercing pain in my side, and I began to run. I didn't know why I was so

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afraid, but I knew that I was running for my life. I ran and ran, I don't know how far, but finally I could run no more. I fell on my face and lay there. Soon there were men all around me holding guns. They were looking down at me. I couldn't move, and then I couldn't even think. Everything went black.

The next month was spent in moving from place to place. People yelling at me, pointing at me, accusing me. Of what I was never quite sure. It's as if I were in a trance. When I did try to talk it seemed that no one understood or cared. I'd try to make them realize what they were doing, but they just looked on with unfeeling eyes, and I'd fall back into my shell of numbness.

There were times I thought I was completely insane, that everything happening around me was a nightmare, and soon I would wake up to find her lying beside me with the baby crying to be fed. Yet this was no dream and I would never awaken.

I have murdered no one, so why am I here? I have stolen nothing, nor have I coveted another's belongings. To the best of my ability I have obeyed the laws, yet for reasons I do not understand I am to spend the rest of my life in a prison. Oh, God, I pray to you, what have I done? Why has thou forsaken me? if I am to be punished for some unknown transgression against thee, I beg of you, let it be with my blood, and not this living purgatory. I beseech thee for help, for those around me have no pity. They care not for life, except their own.

With these last thoughts I must have fallen asleep, for it is dark out now. It's completely quiet except for an occasional rustle in the next cell. Probably one of the other captives tossing and turning in his sleep or maybe he can't sleep either, maybe he's pacing back and forth as I am. I wonder if his thoughts are as desperate as mine.

When I was young I heard about places like this—stories told late at night in whispered voices, about the cold damp dungeons and whip-wielding monsters that inhabit them.

It was common knowledge, the older ones said, that maggot-infested horse meat was the only food given to the captives, and that only once a week. And dry bread soaked in sewer water. For the crime of even making a sound, one could expect to be stabbed through the bars with long spears leaving, not fatal wounds, but deep slashes of painfully exposed flesh.

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If only I'd known the truth, which is so much worse! As I contemplate my four walls and the iron gratings I can't help but reflect: torture leads to pain, but with enough pain comes the bliss of unconsciousness, eventually of death. At least, that is escape. But when you are kept warm and dry, even forcibly fed when you refuse to eat, then death is a long time coming.

How long has it been now? Months? Years? I have no way of telling. Days come and go. I don't usually notice whether it is light or dark outside. I am never allowed to leave this room and can communicate with no one. I can hear my fellow prisoners on both sides, but I cannot talk to them. They both speak different languages. The guards ignore me and what little communication they have between themselves is also in a foreign tongue.

All day long people are coming and going past my cell. They do not come in. They just stand outside, look at me, then leave. Sometimes they talk among themselves before going, but usually they are silent. They speak the same language as the guards and so far I have not been able to pick much of it up. In the beginning I tried to get them to understand my plight, but like those whom I first came in contact with, they were deaf to my pleas. So now I am quiet, with my own thoughts, trying, trying to figure this out. Somehow I know that I have been sentenced to remain here for the rest of my life. And I don't know why.

They have even robbed me of my name. All my life I have been known as Iflon. Even though I can't understand their language, I have picked up two rather unimportant facts. Through the repeated use by my guards and the constant daily spectators, I have learned the name of my prison and the new name I have been given.

I am in a place called the San Diego Zoo, and my new name is Lion.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 384th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an odd and imaginative story, and oddly disturbing . . .

Once again we bring you a "first story" by a talented teen-ager (a specialty of the house). Michael Talbot was only 18 years old and a sophomore at Michigan State University when he wrote "Oddity Imports" and submitted it to EQMM.

There is no better or fuller way to introduce this new and promising writer than to quote from the letter he sent us in response to our inquiry for vital statistics: "I write fiction and poetry, paint in oils and water colors, draw, sculpt, play the piano, and compose. I couldn't begin to mention all my hobbies. I keep ant nests in my room, raise butterflies, grow moss gardens, study the occult—from Theosophy to medieval grimoires, from the astral planes to Tarot. There is a poltergeist in our house that has done everything from pelting me with stones to leaving money in my bed [!] . . . I love miniature things—have constructed a sailboat complete with mast and sail, all less than 1/16 of an inch long . . . have built an entire furnished room inside a matchbox . . . a city that measures 3½ inches across which, in the dark, lights up with hundreds of tiny lights . . . a miniature Victorian dollhouse to the scale of 1/8 of an inch equals one foot . . .

"I am hybriding albino guppies, making papier-mache puppets, dabbling in contact explosives and stage magic . . ."

Is this teen-ager on the threshold of becoming a contemporary Renaissance Man? And, good Lord, what will he write in the years ahead?

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ODDITY IMPORTS

by MICHAEL TALBOT

"'Charlie Chaplin sat on a pin. How many inches did it go in? One, two, three, four . . .'" How much fun they seemed to be having, Marie thought as she wiped the glaze of her breath off the window.

"'Five, six, seven, eight . . .'" Old Mr. Trumble was twirling the rope and Miss Macfarlane was having the time of her life doing peppers.

Marie didn't know whether to feel sad about the people in the yard. There were two dozen of them cloistered from the outside world by the hurricane fence and the shade of the large chestnut trees. Their age averaged in the late thirties, but some, like old Mr. Trumble, would never see 60 again. And yet ask them their age and they would answer with a child-like slur, "Five years old." Or perhaps one of them would hold up an age-gnarled hand and gesture shyly with his fingers. Was it really so tragic? Of course, they had to be taken care of like children, but they were enjoying life. They were young again.

Marie sometimes wondered what emotional problems made them regress and sometimes, although rarely, she thought about her own mother. When had she stopped worrying about her mother?

Was it that night long ago in the hallway?

No . . . Was it that evening she decided her mother was too much of an albatross around her neck? Or was it that day she first came across the little shop, the one off Abingdon Square?

"There you go, Miss," the man said as he held the door open for her. It startled Marie. She blinked naively and pulled her raincoat a little tighter. He was a large man with oddly narrow features and a squinty grin.

She had just stepped under the awnings to escape the rain when the sign on the door attracted her attention. *Oddity Imports*, the impressive little bronze plaque read. She had been peeking in, or at least trying to peek in, when the man opened the door.

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He was clutching a small package and when he saw her staring he tucked it quickly under his coat. Well, she had to go in now. She certainly couldn't just stand there letting the rain pour through the open door.

"Thank you," she said briskly. The man smiled and tipped his homburg. The inside of the shop was more like a salon on the *Queen Mary*. No wonder she couldn't see through the windows. From this side she could tell they had been frosted. Not only that, but thick green-velvet curtains shrouded them like the anteroom of a funeral parlor.

"May I help you?" said a voice from the back. Marie turned and saw a veritable shadow of a woman, very thin, very old.

"The rain," Marie stammered. "I just came in to get out of the rain."

"Perhaps you would like it to stop." The old woman smiled in an odd way.

"I sure wish it would," Marie replied.

"Five dollars for a fifteen-minute lapse, thirty dollars and the whole storm will stop."

Marie chuckled, not grasping the sincerity in the woman's voice. The prospect of purchasing the weather as if it were a pair of shoes made her grin.

"Perhaps you would like to see a few items." The old odd woman turned and vanished through a doorway. Outside a peal of thunder shook the windows and the honk of an automobile returned a muted answer.

This was certainly an odd place, Marie thought, and then laughed. It had been an unintended reminder of the name of the shop—*Oddity Imports*. Within moments the woman returned loaded down with boxes. Marie felt a little uneasy at being the focal point of what was obviously going to become an intense sales pitch. She wondered why there wasn't any other visible merchandise as the old woman placed her armful on the marble-topped counter.

"Now, dear, this is an interesting piece of work." She began wiping the edge of her mouth with a delicate lace handkerchief. From one of the boxes she withdrew a large form wrapped in silk. As she lifted the veil Marie gasped.

"Why, it's beautiful. But surely I couldn't afford something like this."

"I'm sure we could work out some sort of arrangement," the woman said. There on the counter sat a crystal vase of roses. Not only was the receptacle made of glass, but the flowers as well. Each stem, each thorn,

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each shimmering leaf and gossamer petal was of the clearest crystal.

"And that's not all," the old woman murmured, carefully reaching down into the bunch of almost invisible flowers. There was a click and then a whir of machinery as the petals began to spread and as each tiny bud bloomed.

"Would you like to see more?"

Marie's smile broadened as she quickly nodded. From another ornately carved wooden box the woman brought out a tiny glass case. Carefully she rested it on the counter and motioned for Marie to look at it more closely. Inside was a miniature room, a study. The walls were covered with books no larger than pinheads, and a fireplace the size of a fingernail burned brightly in the corner. In the middle was a tiny desk equipped with microscopic pencils, papers, scissors, pens, and everything else a desk should have. Marie gazed intently at the little room when suddenly her attention was pulled toward a diminutive couch in one of the corners.

Abruptly a figure no larger than a tiny insect stood up from behind it. It was a maid complete with a minute feather duster and white cap. There was an almost imperceptible squeak as a door near the couch opened and in walked a wee little man. Marie almost grinned as the maid rushed toward him and the two passionately embraced. The door opened once more and another figure entered, this time a woman. She was obviously the lady of the house, dressed in a long silk gown. She threw herself into a Lilliputian fit of rage and pulled a tiny gun from beneath her dress. A barely audible report rang out as the two figures fell dead, still embracing, and the woman turned the gun on herself.

Marie straightened quickly with an expression of horror on her face as the old woman cackled. "It takes you by surprise, doesn't it?" she said and returned the miniature room to its box.

She then proceeded to show Marie other oddities, all with pure P. T. Barnum showmanship. There was a small golden birdcage with a mechanical bird that sang any song requested. Other boxes revealed such treasures as a dancing ballerina made of fishbone and parchment; a large and brightly colored crepe butterfly that actually fluttered around the room; a bottle with a ship in it and a miniature storm that tossed the little vessel about; marvelously detailed oil paint-

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ings no larger than postage stamps; delicate little insects carved from precious stones; and perfumes with such scents as morning, surprise, and silence.

There were books that read themselves, dolls that imitated every human movement, and mirrors that only reflected a person while he was smiling.

"You mentioned the weather," Marie said, as the woman carried away the last of the boxes. "You said you could make the rain stop."

"Yes," the woman said blankly and brushed off her hands.

"Well, can you?" Marie asked excitedly.

"The weather is one of the items in our intangible line," the old woman replied. "Instead of selling a pill that makes you sleep we sell you sleep itself. Instead of selling a drug that makes you dream we sell you the dreams directly. That way you can buy ten minutes of sleep or ten hours of sleep, not just something that makes you unconscious."

"And dreams?"

"We can sell you dreams in any size, shape, or form. We can sell you a happy dream, a dream about puppies, a dream about riches, a ten-minute dream or a ten-year dream. In a dream you could be a princess or a bird flying free through the heavens—" The old woman traced a wide arc with her hand and Marie shuddered. She hated birds.

The old woman leaned closer. "We also sell emotions, dear, like love and happiness." She paused for a moment and then spoke in a lowered voice. "We occasionally have been known to sell death, too."

"You mean someone comes and murders—"

"No!" the woman corrected harshly. "Remember, I said we sell directly. There is no middle man, no assassin, just the product itself—death."

For a fleeting moment Marie thought of her mother and then mentally reprimanded herself. Just because she seemed to dictate Marie's life from that—that awful chair.

"I think," Marie said, "I think I'll purchase a fifteen-minute pause in this storm."

"Five dollars," the woman blurted out. Marie fumbled in her purse and pulled out a bill.

"There is a guarantee, of course?" Marie asked when the woman motioned with her hand toward the window. There was another crash of lightning as the rain seemingly melted in the cool gray sky.

Considerably unnerved and with an excited feeling in her stomach, Marie made her way

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home quickly. Just as she was climbing up the dark stairs to their second-floor apartment she heard the rain begin to beat on the windows again.

"Fifteen minutes to the second," she said aloud, after glancing at her watch.

"Is that you, Marie?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Who are you talking to?"

"Ah . . . the neighbor's cat."

"Well, please hurry. I'm hungry."

Marie struggled momentarily with the key and then entered the apartment. It wasn't anything elaborate, except for the birds. They were everywhere, in cages and out of them. Parakeets, doves, pigeons, lovebirds, finches, and one fat ebony mynah with amber eyes. A cacophony of voices greeted her.

"Shut the door, Marie," her mother called from the other room. "That terrible cat the neighbors have will sneak in. Don't cook anything greasy tonight either. My stomach has been talking to me all day and I just know anything greasy would—"

"Yes, Mother, I won't." Marie took off her coat and flopped down on the couch. Before she realized what she was doing she looked behind it to see if the maid was still dusting with that tiny feather duster. She tried not to think of the little shop off Abingdon Square, and then she suddenly thought: I should buy a dream. No, Marie, she checked herself, it's all nonsense.

But the rain had stopped for exactly fifteen minutes.

"My dinner, Marie!"

"Right away, Mother." She sighed and forced herself to stand. With a plaintive cry an azure-breasted parakeet swooped down from the curtains and narrowly missed her. She wanted to throw something at it, but her mother would wonder what the noise was.

Since her mother never did any of the work, Marie considered the kitchen to be the one room completely her own. It wasn't much—a sink, a stove that would only work when you kicked it, an old and noisy refrigerator that leaked rivers onto the cracked linoleum. Two enameled louvered doors kept the birds out. She had once put a Japanese paper lantern over the lamp, but it got too hot and burned, leaving a scorched halo on the ceiling. She had also plastered the refrigerator with self-adhesive flowers, but some had come off and left gray scars where they had peeled the paint away.

Still, she really didn't mind it. The only thing she minded about the kitchen was that she could see her mother through

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the cracks in the louvered doors. Like a shadowy icon her mother's form grew out of the familiar outline of the chair. She sat there in the darkness, a gray hulk with her back toward Marie. During the day her mother watched the pigeons and the flies while her birds softly cooed around her. At night she watched the midge swarms dance in the weird bluish light of the mercury-vapor lamps.

That was her mother's life. And Marie's.

Tonight they would have Brussels sprouts, boiled potatoes, and Polish sausage. Her mother complained about the lack of salt in the sprouts, the starchiness of the potatoes, and the spiciness of the meat. The night came slowly . . .

Marie saw it only a week later while she was fixing breakfast. As usual her mother was already up and in her chair. Marie almost didn't hear it prance across the floor over the crackle of frying eggs, but the warped linoleum gave it away.

Marie screamed.

A large well-fed rat glared at her from a corner. "What is it?" her mother cried and Marie could hear her struggle to turn in her chair.

"A rat," Marie answered and grabbed the broom. "A filthy dirty rat that does nothing but sit around and eat our food." She beat it again and again and then realized what she had said.

"Don't forget to wash your hands, dear," her mother warned as Marie took the dark gray form and wrapped it in an oily piece of butcher's paper. "I'm glad you caught the ugly thing. He was probably after my baby finches. And Marie, would you fix me some poached eggs? My stomach has started talking to me and you know what grease—"

"Yes," Marie interrupted sharply.

She visited the little shop the next day. The same withered woman came out to greet her.

"So it's you again. Wait until you see the shipment of puppets we just got in." Before Marie could say anything, the old woman had once more disappeared into the back room. When she returned she had an armful of small wooden figures. "May I?" the old woman asked, and reached over to fasten several heavy black cords on Marie's arms. Marie backed up.

"I'm sorry," the woman said.

"It's just that I'm not in the mood," Marie said.

The woman smiled. "You see, instead of you operating the puppets, they operate you.

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We've already sold two of them to one of our regular customers." She paused. "But that's not what you came for, is it, my dear?"

"No." Marie forced a smile. "I really enjoyed all the things you showed me the last time, but I don't need any of them."

The woman nodded knowingly.

"What I would like to know is—" and Marie stopped. "What I would like to know is the price of the dreams."

"It depends on the dream."

"What do you mean?"

"It depends on the dream. Nightmares are cheaper than good dreams and daydreams are very expensive. There are so few of them on the market nowadays. Also the length of the dream causes the prices to vary. A ten-minute nightmare will cost you only a dollar, but a ten-minute dream of ecstasy will cost you much more. Pipe dreams are a dime a dozen."

Marie let her eyes fall from the woman's gaze and stared down at the marble counter.

"And death?" she asked timorously.

" 'To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub: For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause . . .' " The old woman's eyes narrowed. "So you did not really want a dream at all." Marie regained her courage and peered into the woman's eyes.

"Death, like dreams, comes at many prices. We can sell you a horrible death, a hellish death that distorts and tortures the mind of the victim. That would be very expensive."

"Oh, no," Marie objected.

"We can sell you a lingering death that slowly consumes or we can sell you a death as quiet as a cat that steals upon the victim and silently pounces. If someone were to buy death for me I would ask them to get the quiet death." She threw her head back regally.

Marie handed over one hundred dollars and the old woman brought out a tiny gold box.

"Death is inside this little box?" Marie asked nervously.

"Yes," the old woman replied in a hush. "This box contains enough death for one person," and with that she became silent.

Marie left quickly, returned home, and rushed up the stairs.

"Is that you, Marie?" her mother called.

"Yes."

"Don't fix much for me tonight. I'm not very hungry."

Marie tried not to look at the small exquisitely carved gold box that contained death. She went into the kitchen and

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rattled a few pans. Marie wasn't very hungry either.

She stared at the scorched circle on the ceiling and the ugly gray patches on the refrigerator where the paste-on flowers had been. She looked at the small crimson stain on the linoleum floor where she had killed the rat. And then she looked at the box.

Finally night came.

Her mother was still sitting in the chair like a lifeless automaton when Marie crept softly into the hallway. The mercury-vapor lamps silhouetted the woman in a ghostly blue aura. Marie took a deep breath and then opened the box in the darkness.

It moved.

She could sense it. Warm and silent, it moved. The room seemed a shade darker as her mother shifted her weight and the chair creaked.

A murmuring chorus arose from the birds.

Like a pool of ink it surrounded her mother, who absorbed it like a blotter. Her head slowly drooped to one side.

Coronary arrest, the doctor said the next morning.

That was the story, or at least most of it. For the first few weeks Marie forced herself to celebrate, but too many images began to haunt her mind.

Is that you, Marie?—a voice called from the darkness. She would often find herself staring at the burnt ceiling, at the old and rumbling refrigerator, and sitting in her mother's chair she would even watch a midge swarm in a shaft of light.

At last, in desperation, she sold the meager furnishings of the apartment and went back to the little shop off Abingdon Square.

"You said I could buy emotions," she asked the old woman. "Perhaps I could purchase some peace of mind?"

Another box, this time one carved of ivory. Marie opened it and peered into the velvet-lined interior. It seemed empty, but it was not.

The box brought her here . . .

The nurse came in and placed a tray of food on her bed.

"And how are we this morning, Marie?" the nurse smiled.

"Fine," Marie answered in a childish giggle.

" 'Charlie Chaplin sat on a pin. How many inches did it go in?' " Old Mr. Trumble and Miss Macfarlane were having so much fun. After Marie finished dressing and the nurse put her hair up in pigtails she would go join them.

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a *NEW* sports detective story by

JON L. BREEN

Ed Gorgon, major league umpire, is back—but this time the name of the game is not baseball. Ed Gorgon officiates in other sports, and here is one of the rarest to appear in a detective story—basketball. With the professional basketball playoffs soon to begin, this is an appropriate issue to give you the story of a class reunion game. Twenty years ago Hyde University won the basketball title from Holly Hill State, 84-82. Now the two original teams celebrate homecoming day by playing a return match—"just a friendly game for nostalgia's sake." But you better not believe it . . .

OLD-TIMERS' GAME

by JON L. BREEN

Nowadays big-league umpiring doesn't pay badly at all—not as good as playing, you understand, but enough to keep body and soul together over the winter, especially for a man with 25 years of seniority like me. Ed Gorgon is my name and I used to do other kinds of sports officiating when baseball was out of season—sometimes football, more often basketball; but now you wouldn't catch me running up and down the basketball court with a whistle in my mouth for all the tea in China. I'm getting a little old for it, and besides I don't need the money.

But it happened that this last winter I *did* officiate at a basketball game, in the course of which I ran into one of the strangest and cruelest murders I ever saw and couldn't do a damn thing about it.

The story starts with a telephone call I got from Marvin Boyle, athletic director of Hyde University, where I had refereed many contests back in the forties and fifties.

"Ed, how'd you like to work a game for us?"

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"Marvin, I haven't worked a basketball game in I don't know how long. That's for the younger men."

"No, but look, Ed. This isn't a regular game. It's an old-timer's game, between the Hyde U. and Holly Hill State clubs of 1952. I'll even be playing myself. We're all fat and middle-aged and oh-so-slow. You'll have no trouble at all keeping up with us. Ed, everybody I've talked to about this has said the same thing: you gotta get Ed Gorgon to referee. He was the most colorful ref in the West Central Conference in those days."

"Oh, yeah, I was sure colorful. And you guys all loved me."

Marvin chortles a little at that. I must have called a dozen technical fouls on him in his playing days, but he'd stayed friendly off the court.

"The gate receipts will benefit the scholarship funds of the two schools. And believe me, Ed, we aren't playing for blood. It's just a friendly game for nostalgia's sake."

I mull that over. Remembering the rivalry of Hyde U. and Holly Hill State (H and double-H, they were called), I can't imagine a rematch played for anything but blood. But after all, these will be doctors and lawyers and businessmen having a good time, not youngsters to whom winning is a matter of life and death. And how fast can a bunch of forty-year-old men run? They shouldn't be able to tire out a big-league umpire who keeps in condition.

"I think I'll do it, Boyle. But you watch that mouth of yours or you'll be taking an early shower."

Old-timer's games are a tradition in baseball. The pitchers don't throw too hard and the runners don't run too fast, but sometimes you see a really sweet swing from some old slugger; you see the ball taking a long ride, and you think, "That ball doesn't know this is an old-timer's game." There's usually somebody of 50 or 60 there who looks as if he could still play in the majors. I've seen some great defensive plays in old-timers' games by guys like Vince DiMaggio, Luke Easter, Dixie Walker.

So I figure an old-timer's game in basketball will be about the same—not much defense, not much fast-breaking, but a lot of fancy shooting and a few quick moves that turn back the clock, if only for an instant.

I arrive at Hyde University the morning of the game. It's brisk but sunny and the sprawling campus is covered

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with snow. The game is to be at six that evening, as a preliminary to a much-less-talked-about showdown between the current H and double-H varsities. It's homecoming day, and there are swarms of old grads around, in various age groups, and three times I am mistaken for an old classmate, though I never attended Hyde University; my only appearances were as the striped-shirted party-pooper, out to spoil everybody's fun. (You could say I've enjoyed more boos than booze on the Hyde campus.)

At noon I am a guest (if not honored, at least unbooed) at a luncheon in honor of the two 1952 teams. I recognize most of the players from those teams, and they, of course, remember me, but not well enough to greet me with anything but friendliness during the pre-lunch standing-around-and-drinking session.

"Ed, I'm Bruce Ridley," says a thin man about two inches taller than my 6' 3" (I feel like a dwarf at this kind of gathering). He extends a hand large enough to palm a basketball.

"Why, sure," I say. "Couldn't forget the best player to ever come out of double-H. You're lookin' good, young fella." I'm half lying. He hasn't put on weight like most of his contemporaries, but his face looks drawn and old for a man of 41, though his hair is still jet-black.

"And this is my wife Wanda. Do you remember Ed Gorgon, Wanda?"

"Of course," she says. "He's on TV nearly every Saturday."

She's a beauty, and I know I remember her, though I can't place where. For some reason it seems strange to me she should be married to Bruce Ridley. She's a blonde, with freckles, the Doris Day type in looks, the sort of lady who in her late thirties still looks like a cheerleader. That's it, a cheerleader.

"Now, Mrs. Ridley," I say, "I think I remember you as one of those people who tried so hard to keep my mind off the game. But don't I remember that you were a cheerleader for Hyde U? And yet here I find you married to Bruce Ridley of Holly Hill. Or does my memory fail me?"

"It doesn't," she smiles. "A lot of people thought it was a strange match, too."

"Pete Murphy, in particular," says Bruce Ridley.

A little background here. Pete Murphy of Hyde and Bruce Ridley of Holly Hill had been high-school teammates. When they went to different universities they became less

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friendly rivals, especially when their mutual girl friend followed Murphy to Hyde U. Both Ridley and Murphy were stars, all-Americans, but Murphy had always gotten more than his share of glory, more than his share of the ink.

This trend was climaxed in the 1952 league championship playoff game when Murphy outplayed Ridley markedly and Hyde won the title, 84-82. Murphy went on to a career in the pros, while Ridley concentrated on a law career, confining his basketball to a few seasons of AAU.

But apparently Ridley won in one respect: he won the beautiful Wanda.

"I haven't seen Murphy yet," I say. "He here today?"

"Oh, sure, Pete's here," Wanda says. "He's got a crewcut, so you can't miss him among all those baldies and longhairs. We still see a lot of Pete, don't we, Bruce?"

"Yeah," Bruce says. "Have you seen the old team? All five of our starters are here, and all five of Hyde's, too. Amazing we should all be here and all able to play."

"You've been a lucky group," I say, "fighting off the ravages of old age."

"Yeah," Bruce says. He looks sad. My kidding hasn't amused him, though I think it's appropriate inasmuch as I'm ten to fifteen years older than these "old-timers."

One by one Bruce Ridley drags his teammates over to say hello to me. Francis Maine, their seven-foot center, the last of the stone-fingered goons, has ballooned to over 300 pounds and I'm a little worried about him playing in tonight's game. Maine played well enough for Holly Hill in his day, though he slowed down their attack somewhat, but I remember George Mikan taking him apart in sections in the NBA.

"Georgia" Peachum, who started at forward opposite Ridley, has also put on some weight—he's a hearty, back-slapping salesman type. I remember him as the team comedian, and he had to be to deal with a nickname like Georgia. Bill Oliver, their little long-range shooting guard, also has a potbelly, but Ace Craddock, oldest of the group at 46, still looks like a lean spider.

Then the Hyde forces try to ingratiate themselves with the referee. Marvin Boyle, the athletic director, huge and fat and apparently far from the redneck I used to know, brings over his under-sized (5' 9") brother Homer, the playmaker of the Hyde team, who's gotten very bald and looks a bit like

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Red Klotz, that little guy who travels with the Harlem Globetrotters and heads their stooge team. James Atkins, Hyde's center, who used to give six inches to Maine but made up for it by his mobility, still looks graceful and well coordinated. I imagine he's one of the ones who will have to let up some this evening not to make his contemporaries look bad.

Then there's Frank Gray, the other half of Hyde's famous "runt" backcourt; he was the first black man in Hyde basketball history, and I hear he still holds his own in pickup games on the New York playgrounds. He looks as if he could.

And last of all, Pete Murphy comes over, close-cropped as advertised, still in shape, his face rock-hard and grim. I hear he's coaching in high school—the kind of coach, I imagine, who rules by sheer terror.

So that's the cast of characters. They seem friendly enough. No bitterness. No animosity. And this evening they'll be playing a friendly game. For fun. For charity. For nostalgia.

We used to consider the Hyde Fieldhouse a snake pit. The milder term is crackerbox. It's noisy, stuffy, shabby, and shall-we-say intimate. The first row of spectators is practically sitting on the court, and anyone sitting there is running the risk of having a player in his lap. Or worse, a fat official. They've never replaced the snake pit—I guess they figured if the 1952 alumni ever came back for a game it wouldn't be the same in some new and shiny and sweet-smelling sports arena. Hyde is a great school for tradition.

Everybody's laughing and carrying on during the introductions. Even Pete Murphy gives the impression he's not taking this game seriously. And he shouldn't—nothing that happens tonight can change the result of that other game 20 years ago: Hyde 84, Holly 82. Murphy with 27 for the winners and a great all-around game—driving, twisting lay-ups, rebound after rebound, superb defense against his rival Ridley. And Ridley with 17, ten under his average, making only six of 26 shots from the floor. Ridley had played so badly that the best games of Craddock (31 points) and Maine (20 points, 22 rebounds) were neutralized.

The old-timer's game begins just as old Ed wants it, slow and relaxed. My fellow referee is a younger man, and I let him do most of the puffing and whistling. Atkins, who can still leap, wins the center jump from Maine, who can't get his feet

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off the floor, and the first few minutes of the game are a shooting exhibition by Hyde's "runt backcourt." The roly-poly Homer Boyle and the lithe Gray can still shoot from long range, and Hyde is soon leading 14-4, with only old Ace Craddock able to find the hoop for the double-H.

Then, after about five minutes, things start happening. Pete Murphy gets the ball and is isolated one-on-one against Ridley. Murphy gives Ridley a great body fake and drives around him for the basket. It's 16-4. The crowd goes crazy.

Francis Maine misses on an incredibly incompetent hook shot and Atkins of Hyde rebounds. As I expected, he's taking it easy, playing like a youngster against the old men. Gray brings the ball down and passes to Murphy, who again drives around Ridley and makes a corkscrew lay-in even more impressive than the one before. The crowd again shows its appreciation; the scoreboard shows 18-4, and I say to myself, Once was enough, Murphy. You showed you can do it, so why rub it in?

About this time, substitutes, not all from the 1952 team, begin to come in for both sets of alumni. Fat men like Georgia Peachum, Bill Oliver, and the Boyle brothers are already running out of gas. The coach for the double-H alums tries to send a man in for Bruce Ridley, but Ridley shakes his head grimly and the sub replaces Ace Craddock instead. I can tell Bruce is upset at being shown up by Murphy and it's apparent he intends to fight back. I notice Wanda Ridley in the stands, looking young and beautiful and completely enthralled in the drama.

The duel that ensues is something to behold. Bruce Ridley finds moves he's forgotten he had. He starts to drive around Murphy for baskets; he also shoots over Murphy from outside, one skill in which he far outshines Murphy. For several minutes it's as if there are only two men on the floor; it becomes evident to everyone in the place that these two 40-year-olds are playing for keeps, and a time out called at my suggestion by the double-H coach doesn't cool them off.

With eight minutes left to play in the first half, Hyde leading 22-16, Bruce Ridley starts to sprint down the court after a missed Hyde shot, hoping to get a fast break. Maine rebounds and hits him with a good pass. Ridley is all alone, driving to the basket, his face turning red. Near the goal he gasps, falls, clutches his chest.

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A man in a gray suit, apparently a doctor, rushes onto the court from the first row of seats, not waiting to be called for. But there's nothing he can do. Bruce Ridley is dead.

Wanda Ridley makes quite a scene in Marvin Boyle's office later. Sobs and hysterical recriminations.

"I knew he had a bad heart! I knew he shouldn't play! I tried to convince him he shouldn't but he insisted! He said a little exercise was good for his heart. And he had to prove something out there against Pete. He always had to prove something."

"A little exercise?" I say. For that remark I get some funny looks from the players, especially Marvin Boyle, who as organizer of the game looks more stricken than the others. I have a feeling he thinks I'm being flippant to a grieving widow and this, he thinks, is in questionable taste.

"It was just supposed to be a fun game, Wanda," Marvin says. "If I'd known Bruce had a bad heart I'd never have let him play."

Pete Murphy shakes his head. "What a terrible thing! Poor old Bruce. He was such a competitor." He puts his arm around the widow and murmurs comforting words.

I turn around and leave the office. I've had enough damn hypocrisy for one evening.

Yes, I said hypocrisy. And yes, earlier I said murder.

There's not a doubt in my mind that Bruce Ridley was murdered, and yet I can't do a thing about it. For he actually did die of a heart attack. And Wanda Ridley and Pete Murphy were guilty of conspiracy, even if a word of their plan never passed between them.

Wanda said nothing to anyone before the game about Bruce's bad heart, even though she claimed later she'd tried to talk him out of playing. If she'd really wanted to stop him from playing, wouldn't she have told somebody about it? Marvin or somebody? But it was essential to the plan that nobody know about Ridley's bad heart. And when I noticed Wanda in the stands during the game, she didn't look one bit concerned about her husband's health. She looked excited. As eager for blood as Murphy seemed to be on the court.

And what about Murphy? According to the next day's paper he told the press, "I had no idea Bruce had a bad heart. He was bitter, always wanted to beat me on the court." But why then did Murphy bring the game to Ridley? Why had

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Murphy, with his team already far ahead, started playing deadly serious basketball? He'd had the greater career. What did he have to gain by showing up Ridley?

James Atkins had deliberately dogged it in the game to avoid making his fellow players look bad. Why hadn't Pete Murphy done the same? Ridley's "bitterness" and "need to prove something" had apparently surfaced only after Murphy had started to bug him, only when, to save face, Ridley was trying to play Murphy even.

Murphy had topped Ridley everywhere but in the love department. I think he had to beat him even there. I think he knew all about Ridley's bad heart—he was probably the only one there who did aside from Wanda. I think Murphy and Wanda Ridley were tacitly working together to get Ridley out of the way.

I can imagine Wanda taunting Bruce about Pete Murphy's superiority on the court, egging him on to play rather than trying to talk him out of it.

In short, I think it was murder—premeditated murder. But murder by inducing a heart attack is not murder if you can't prove it.

I can only hope that Fate or God or Poetic Justice gives Pete and Wanda (now Mrs. Murphy) their due. They're now beyond the reach of Ed Gorgon's whistle.

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THE JEWEL OF CHILDERIC

by MICHAEL HARRISON

Never, not even in the days of my greatest misfortune and unhappiness, had I been so perilously close to despair.

That my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, trusted confidant not only of the Prefect of the Parisian police but of the crowned heads of Europe and even of some of the most respected administrators of my own infant Republic, that this noble man whom I had learned to revere, that he should have been accused, in his own house, of common theft—

I have before me, as I write, an open scrap-book to whose pages have been affixed extracts from those newspapers which had been supplied, through the malice of his accusers, the material of calumny even before the events had occurred. But let me tell of this most alarming of all our adventures in an orderly fashion. Let me begin at the beginning.

On one balmy summer's evening, not long after the last of the senior Bourbons had made his way secretly and in haste

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from Paris, and the mob had exhibited its fervent *patriotism* by sacking the royal apartments at St. Cloud, my friend was standing by an open window of our little back library or book-closet, *au troisieme*, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain.

"*Peste!*" he exclaimed, taking the meerschaum pipe from his mouth. "We have a visitor—and this fine evening I would gladly have dispensed with such diversion as the most charming visitor might bring." For though the windows of our little back library did not overlook the coachyard, we might, nevertheless, hear any vehicle which entered the yard.

A few minutes later the door opened and our domestic, Hyacinthe, advanced into the room with a bow. A letter, sealed with a great disk of purple wax, rugose with extravagant armorial bearings, was in his hand.

"A message from Madame la Baronne de F——s, for the perusal of Monsieur le Chevalier Dupin."

My friend broke the seal, and scanned the few lines written on lace-edged paper.

"Pray show Madame la Baronne into the *salon*, where we shall join her. Serve the customary refreshments, Hyacinthe."

As the door closed behind our domestic, I exclaimed, "But, Dupin, this is the person against whom—"

"I collected evidence—the evidence used in the action brought against her by Prince Louis de R——n. I wonder what errand brings her here?"

Madame was awaiting us in the *salon*. Dupin bowed and expressed those formal sentiments that common courtesy demands, even when we are with our enemies. Madame la Baronne bowed and responded in kind. Dupin then asked her permission to present me—a permission graciously extended by this lady of humble English origins, whose ambitions and behavior bade fair to rock the new Kingdom before it had fairly settled down to show the world what liberal monarchy could do for the restless people of France.

After Hyacinthe had handed around the wine and *patisseries*, and the door had closed behind the domestic, Madame de F——s observed, with a coyness which accorded *ill* with her flashing eye and domineering manner, "Perhaps, Monsieur le Chevalier, you are anxious to know what has induced me to call on one who has not, so far, shown himself my most chivalrous supporter? Well, first of all, let me urge you not to fear that I

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entertain any resentment toward you for the construction you put on the tragic events at the Château de L—. I understand that the honesty for which you are justly renowned would necessarily have counselled you to spare no feelings, so long as you demonstrated the truth *as you perceived it.*"

I thought that I saw the ghost of a smile on Dupin's lips as he noted the emphasis that the Baroness placed on the last four words.

"Did you know, Monsieur," Madame de F—s continued, "that his Majesty, for whose son I have done so much—secured him, in the face of all the odium inspired against me, the reversion of the greatest estate in France—you know, Monsieur, that it was I, and I alone, who did this for the King's son?"

"Yes, Madame, I know it."

"Well, then, you may or may not know that the King, having gained this priceless heritage for his son, has now turned against me."

"I heard something of the matter."

"And so his Majesty has refused to permit me to carry out the one request that his late Royal Highness—my great friend, as you know—asked me to discharge in person: the conversion of the Château de G— into an asylum for the men who fought in Conde's army. This, I learn, his Majesty forbids on the insupportable grounds that the establishment of such an asylum for maimed or pauper soldiers who fought for the Crown of France would ill accord with the liberal sentiments of the July Monarchy, and might—*might*, observe, Monsieur le Chevalier!—incite the mob to new acts of subversion and violence."

"But what, Madame, with respect, has all this to do with me?"

"This, Monsieur," the lady answered, turning upon both of us the full force of her *mesmeric* regard. "I wish to soften the King's heart with a gift of such value, of such importance, that he will no longer be able to refuse me permission to carry out the late Duke's request. And the gift that I wish to acquire—to purchase, for presentation to the King—will soon be in *your* hands, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"In mine, Madame?" my friend cried, making no attempt to conceal his profound astonishment.

"In yours, Monsieur. You, Monsieur Dupin, will soon be in possession of one of the great treasures of ancient France, lost since the Revolution of '89, and just recovered in London."

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"Madame, you amaze me! *I* shall soon be in possession of this treasure? Why, who will be so generous as to give it to me?"

"An acquaintance of mine, whose family fled from Paris to London in the Terror. He is even now on his way to see you. His arrangements provided for his departure from Dover, by the packet, this morning. He will take the light English coach to Paris at ten to-morrow morning, and he will, all being well, arrive at the Hotel Messe-Meurice, Rue de la Prison, at six P.M. on the following day."

"I see. To-day is Monday. I ought, then, to expect him on Wednesday evening or Thursday morning. Is it permitted to inquire which treasure this gentleman is bringing me?"

From her reticule the Baroness drew out one of those leather *porte-monnaies* which open in the manner of a book. From an inner receptacle of this purse the lady removed what were evidently pieces cut from English newspapers. These she handed to my friend, who began to read them.

Summarized, the several extracts, some more detailed than others, told how a French citizen, son of *emigres* parents, and himself well-established as a merchant in London, had come to the decision to restore to France the famed *chef d'oeuvre* of Merovingian times, the so-called Jewel of Childeric. This was a portrait of King Childeric, engraved, in intaglio, on the back of a disk of rock-crystal.

The French merchant, Monsieur Souvigny (the newspapers' report continued), explained that the Jewel had formerly been in the possession of the late father of the Chevalier C. August Dupin, to whose son Monsieur Jean-Jacques Souvigny was now proposing to return it.

"I see," said my friend, handing back the pieces of newspaper to the Baroness: "I see now why you visited me, Madame—to inform me of Monsieur Souvigny's intention to make restoration—"

"Say rather *restitution*, Monsieur. Monsieur Souvigny's father stole it from yours."

"Just so."

"Do you not remember the Jewel, Monsieur? I know that, in '94, you were but a child—"

"Madame, I was too young to notice, let alone interest myself in, Merovingian *objets d'art*. No, I have no recollection of this antiquity.

"So, Madame," said Dupin thoughtfully, "this is the treasure which you are asking me to hand over to you so that you, in turn, may give it to his Majesty?"

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"Yes. In order that I may make his Majesty a gift of such value that he will have the courage to reject the advice of his timid Ministers, and permit me to fulfill the ambition that the late Duke had when he entrusted me with the task of founding—as Madame de Maintenon did a century ago—a home for deserving old soldiers. Now, Monsieur, that is my ambition. A worthy one, is it not?"

"No one," Dupin observed prudently, "might, in all justice, find fault with the founding of an asylum for decayed old soldiers."

After Madame la Baronne de F——s had driven from the courtyard of our house in that splendid equipage which had been only one of the least valuable of the late Duke's gifts, Dupin said, "Let us go back to our little book-closet, where I may smoke some Latakia and meditate on this remarkable woman and her even more remarkable story."

As we walked up the broad old staircase of Henry II's time, and came to a large glass-fronted bookcase which stood on the landing outside our favorite room, Dupin paused to examine the books. Hidden away in one of the darkest corners of the bookcase were a dozen or so tall, thick volumes bound in the finest scarlet morocco, with gilt lettering on the spines.

"Pray be so good," my friend requested, "as to take out those tall red volumes, while I hold up the lamp."

I did so, and together we carried the heavy tomes into our little book-closet, depositing them on a table between the two windows.

"On the face of it—on the face of it—" Dupin murmured, sinking into his fauteuil, and drawing toward him his pewter tobacco-jar, "the tale that we have heard to-day has elements of the most unchallengeable plausibility. Yet, though one would be foolish to deny that coincidences are encountered as much in actual life as in the romances of Mr. Matthew Gregory Lewis or Mrs. Ann Radcliffe or the *Reverend* Maturin, they should—in actual life—be accepted with a great deal more reserve than when we encounter them in novels."

"Your remarks, my dear friend, are *a propos* of—what?"

"Of the fact," he said, lighting his pipe with a match ignited from the small spirit-lamp on his sofa-table, "of the fact that this is the *second* time that a mediaeval jewel has turned up in our experience, and that, in both cases, the voluble and not inexperienced lady who has just

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left us has been involved. Do you not remember the case of the wretched Monsieur de St. Dizier, killed by his scapegrace nephew? Of course!

"Do you not also remember that this person was foully done to death so that the murderer might secure possession of another mediaeval antiquity, the so-called Jewel of Lothaire, part of the ancient Regalia of France—and a priceless treasure that, we had reason to believe, had been pawned with Monsieur de St. Dizier by the Baronne de F——s herself?"

"I recall these matters perfectly, now that you have brought them back to memory."

"Just so. And I ask myself this question: whence, in *reality*, did this so-called Jewel of Childeric originate?

"However, let us determine one fact. Let us see whether or not the famed Jewel of Childeric was ever in the possession of my family. Yes," he added, indicating the volumes that we had taken from the bookcase, "these tomes represent the detailed inventory of our houses both in Paris and Saumur. They are all that is left of either. The volumes escaped because, at the time of the sackings, they were lodged with an attorney. Come," he said, the evidence of his deep agitation apparent in his gruffy voice and sharp manner, "let us begin our search."

The dawn had broken when, with a sigh, I closed the last volume and shook my head.

"I should have been deeply astonished," said Dupin, with an air of what seemed nothing at all like disappointment, "had you or I found anything.

"Now I *wonder* what Monsieur Souvigny wants of me? I confess that I am looking forward with no little eagerness to a sight of this valuable relic of France's Merovingian past. But what *excessive* generosity to offer it to *me*, whose family never possessed it in the first place!

"And next in order of importance to the Jewel of Childeric—though not so *very* far behind!—I am all anxiety to see this Monsieur Souvigny.

"Well, it has been a day full of interest. Let us now go to bed, while I compose myself to await, with what patience I may command, the arrival of this noble-hearted *emigre* on Wednesday night or Thursday morning. And we must not forget to invite G—— to be one of those to welcome Monsieur Souvigny."

A commissionaire brought us a note on Wednesday evening to inform us that, the light English coach having arrived in the Rue de la Prison three hours late,

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Monsieur Souvigny would have the honor of calling on us at half-past ten on Thursday morning. My friend and I were standing, not by an open window of our little book-closet, but of a room which overlooked the courtyard. When the first of the coaches to arrive rolled over the cobbles to the *porte-cochere*, it contained G——, invited by Dupin to be present twenty minutes before Monsieur Souvigny was due to arrive. Hyacinthe had been instructed to bring the Prefect of the Parisian police to this open window on the third floor, for reasons that Dupin did not condescend to explain, though there was certain other information of which my friend put G—— in possession.

"Ah!" said G., looking out of the window, as another coach came into the courtyard, "that is my friend from the Archives Nationales—he is enthusiasm itself to see this priceless relic of France's very beginnings! You have no objection to my having invited him?"

"Indeed not," said Dupin, as we watched an old shabby fiacre, drawn by a bony nag, discharge a lank, shabby, schoolmaster-like man who proceeded to haggle with the *cocher* over a couple of sous. "I have a presentiment that when Monsieur Souvigny arrives, he, too, will not be unaccompanied."

And so, in fact, it proved. Monsieur Souvigny not only arrived in the company of Madame la Baronne, but arrived in her splendid equipage, doing himself the honor of handing her out.

My friend and I received the last of our guests in our *salon*, but not before, in casting a final glance out of the window overlooking the carriage-yard, we had the opportunity of seeing how exceedingly close to the surface was Monsieur Souvigny's decided irritability, not to say his nervousness. For, after having handed out the Baroness, he began to walk, the lady's fingers on his arm, toward the *porte-cochere* of our old mansion. As he did so, he passed inadvertently close to the lady's superb matched bays.

His head inclined courteously to attend to his fair companion's conversation, Monsieur Souvigny did not see the horse that he almost brushed in passing. The quadruped, taking advantage of Monsieur Souvigny's preoccupation, began to nuzzle his coat-pocket. In the clear morning air the distinguished *emigre*'s blow on the animal's muzzle sounded distinctly, and so, indeed, did Monsieur Souvigny's angry words, spoken in English: "To the D—— with you, you brute!"

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We saw that Monsieur Souvigny made some apologetic observation, *a propos* of his angry outburst, to the Baroness; but she merely shrugged, and indicated that they should continue.

It was a disagreeable incident to see, but, later, Dupin, who turned away from the window with a smile on his lips, was to remind me that it had been a significant occurrence as well.

Monsieur Souvigny did not disappoint us. True to Dupin's prognostications, our visitor began by asking our permission to invite Madame de F——s to the meeting, since, as he explained, "Madame la Baronne hopes to become even more intimately associated with the affair, as indeed, so I am informed, Madame has already apprised you, Monsieur le Chevalier."

Dupin bowed and expressed his satisfaction that the Baroness had been able to join us. I could see that my friend was subjecting Monsieur Souvigny to a close but not openly noticeable examination. The man was about thirty-five, and though dressed in the latest English mode, his clothes not only seemed all too new but of a costly kind to which he appeared not to be accustomed. The English have a word for the type of man who would ape the appearance of, while failing to ape the manner of, a man of breeding. The English call such a man a "gent." Monsieur Souvigny impressed me as being a "gent."

Not, I must record, that he appeared to be ill-at-ease. To the contrary. He showed no signs of embarrassment when, at the invitation of my friend, the Chevalier, he repeated and embellished the tale that we had already perused in the extracts from the English newssheets. The only additional—and highly significant—detail to come forth from Monsieur Souvigny's own narrative was that the Jewel had not been *stolen* by his late father, as the English sheets had mistakenly reported, but *saved*. The late Monsieur Souvigny, passing the Hôtel Dupin in March, 1794, had been caught up in the Vandal mob, swept, willy-nilly, into the house, and had there snatched up the Jewel, lying among some other curiosities scattered when a glass-topped table had been overturned.

"My revered father," Monsieur Souvigny explained, "had but one thought—to save something for the unhappy family whose domestic treasures he saw being plundered and pillaged by the mob."

"But," interjected G——, in no very courteous tone of voice, "all this happened nearly

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forty years ago! Your late father never returned the Jewel, and you yourself—it seems to me that you Souvignys have certainly taken your time in making a simple act of restitution!"

But for that, too, Monsieur Souvigny had a ready explanation. It seems that Souvigny *pere* had intended to return it many years since, but, after he had left France, he had been troubled to read that the Dupin family had demonstrated what, for him, were disagreeable symptoms of liberal sentiment—and he had not troubled to return the Jewel.

"And you, Monsieur?" G—— asked.

"I have rid myself of my late father's prejudices, but I have a prejudice of my own that I regret to have to mention here. It is true that my father always regarded the Jewel as having been the property of the Dupin family, but I have since come to the conclusion that this relic of ancient France, which must have come from the Regalia of France, can never legally have belonged to your late father, and therefore belongs to the Kingdom of France."

Dupin smiled.

"We may have less to argue on in that respect than you appear to believe, Monsieur. But, while we leave the consideration of ownership aside for a moment, may we not see this famous Jewel of Childeric?"

The Jewel was in a worn morocco case, about the size made to hold pocket-watches—watches of the newer, smaller type, and not those big, old-fashioned timepieces known vulgarly as "turnips." It was a disk of rock-crystal, from which the original gold edge had been rudely torn—perhaps by the revolutionists. The figure of the King, with a legend in dog-Latin around the periphery of the disk, was in that stiff-legged mediaeval posture with which the recent exhibition of Merovingian art has made so many of us familiar. Monsieur Delaporte, the gentleman from the Archives Nationales, expressed his fervent hope that—to whomever the Jewel might rightfully belong—it would eventually find an honored place in his museum.

As the Jewel passed from hand to hand, I observed that Monsieur Souvigny appeared to be deeply occupied with the small spring-catch which fastened the morocco case.

"*Peste!*" he exclaimed. "I must take this to an artisan, and let him repair it, so that it closes the box." As he spoke thus, Monsieur Delaporte handed back the Jewel, but, with a preoccupied look, Monsieur Souvigny merely accepted the

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Jewel from the antiquary, and laid it down on the table by his coffee-cup, from which, I recall, he had drunk very little.

"Well," he said, after having poked and prodded the tongue of the brass catch, "I suppose that it will serve until I can buy a new box." He pulled a huge, old-fashioned timepiece—a veritable "turnip"—from his fob-pocket, and with a glance at the *ormoulu* clock on the mantel-shelf, rose and walked over to the fire-place, so as to set his watch by the time shown on our clock. "Perhaps, Monsieur le Préfet, you would be so good as to obtain the opinion of some eminent Law Officer of the Crown as to the rightful ownership of this antiquity? Excellent! Now, gentlemen, as I have promised to accompany the Baroness back to her hotel, I must ask you to excuse me. I shall," he said, returning the "turnip" to his pocket, "now replace the Jewel in its box, and have the honor to bid you *au revoir.*"

He walked over to the table on which he had laid down the Jewel and—

"*Mille tonnerres!*" he shouted. "Where is the Jewel?"

Let me spare the reader the painful scenes which followed, in which both Monsieur Souvigny and his titled friend retrogressed, as the zoologists say, to their plainly humble origins. They shouted, they stamped, they screamed. The uncouth cries were distinguished by two very clearly heard phrases: "a den of thieves" and "blatant robbery of the French people."

I pass over, too, the searching of room and persons to which both G—— and Dupin—the latter with a cynical smile that he made no attempt to hide—willingly submitted. Hyacinthe, summoned by bell, was sent to fetch Sergeant Fournier, G——'s factotum, from the coach in the courtyard, and Fournier was sent off by G. to the Rue de Jerusalem, to fetch two male and one female searchers—the female to examine the person of the Baroness, who had been the first to demand "proof of innocence."

The searches were made with care. Nothing was found, neither on the persons searched nor in the *salon.* The Jewel had disappeared. Monsieur Souvigny left the house abruptly, vowing vengeance against "the thieves," and promising to lay all "the information" before the editors of the most irresponsible newssheets in Paris.

"The villain!" I exclaimed, when we were at last alone. "Why, Dupin, did you not permit me to chastise him as he so richly deserved?"

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Dupin smiled.

"The others would have interfered. Besides," he added, filling his meerschaum pipe with the rich Latakia to which he was ever faithful, "I did not wish to endanger the Jewel of Childeric in any way. A tussle *might* have injured it."

"But," I exclaimed, "how could I have damaged the Jewel in chastising this insufferable fellow?"

"Because it was in his pocket," said my friend, puffing away at his pipe, and hiding himself, as was his wont, within a thick cloud of fragrant smoke. "Oh yes, indeed. Why, you did not suppose for a moment that it had been lost? Oh no, nothing of the sort."

"But this Souvigny was searched."

"Yes. He hid it well, to conceal it from G——'s perceptive searchers."

"Are you certain?"

"I am positive."

"How can you be so positive it was on Souvigny's person?"

"Because it was not on the person of any of the others—ourselves included, of course. Nor was it dropped, to hide itself accidentally in the room. *Ergo*, it was concealed on the person of Monsieur Souvigny."

"Then why, Dupin, in Heaven's name, did you not denounce him?"

My friend smiled again.

"For two reasons. The first, as I told you, that I do not wish to expose the Jewel to damage in any way. The second, that I wish to expose an infernal plot to discredit me. I have solved the mystery; I shall summon both the plotters once more to meet me here; and now I propose to take the air. I would rather you refrained from offering to accompany me. I have two things to commission. When G——, Madame la Baronne, and her friend—as well, of course, as Monsieur Delaporte—arrive again within a day or two, I shall explain everything."

"But the news-sheets! The scandal!"

Dupin shrugged.

"They will simply have to eat their words, that is all. I have endured scandal before this, my friend."

Dupin had warned me not to start the mantel-shelf clock, that he had, he told me, purposely stopped. Apart from this, though, I was as ignorant of his thoughts and actions and ratiocinations as were the visitors, with us at the invitation of G——, who took their seats as Hyacinthe handed around coffee.

"I requested that Monsieur le Préfet assemble you here to-day," Dupin explained, "be-

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cause I have some excellent news—especially for Monsieur Souvigny. The Jewel has been found. What, Monsieur Souvigny, did not Monsieur G—— so inform you? *Tiens!* What an oversight on his part! But you seem thunderstruck, Monsieur Souvigny; are you not gratified?"

"Yes—yes—I suppose so," said Monsieur Souvigny, now as white as though he had seen a ghost. "But it is such a shock—of relief, of course—that I hardly know what to say. Where—where was it found, Monsieur?"

"Oh, it had rolled under the carpet. You must have dropped it, Monsieur Souvigny. Now, Monsieur Delaporte, inform us please: that engraving on rock-crystal that Monsieur Souvigny showed us a couple of days ago—would you affirm, from your experience as an antiquary, that this was a veritable work of art from the time of the Merovingian kings?"

"Indeed, I would stake my reputation, both as an antiquary and as a senior officer of the Archives Nationales, on it."

"Good. I regret that it was mislaid the other day. I recall that Monsieur Souvigny put it down on the table, by his coffee-cup, because he was, at that moment, trying to repair the catch of the box in which he had brought the Jewel. Is that not so, Monsieur Souvigny?"

"Yes, perfectly true," said the man, through lips which were now deadly pale. "But, Monsieur le Chevalier, pardon me, but have you *truly* found the Jewel?"

"Of course," said my friend, with a *nonchalant* air, taking the missing Jewel from his pocket, and laying it down on the table beside a cup of steaming coffee.

Monsieur Souvigny half rose from his chair, but, with a gesture of undeniable authority, Dupin waved him back.

"Patience! You shall all examine it in a moment. In the meanwhile—" He glanced at the mantel-clock and made a sound of annoyance. "*Peste!* That stupid Hyacinthe has forgotten to wind the clock! Have you the right time, Monsieur Souvigny? I know that you carry a watch."

The man pulled his vast "turnip" out of his fob-pocket and —Dupin snatched it from his grasp, pushing the watch's owner back into his chair with no little force. Monsieur Souvigny collapsed into the fauteuil, and stared at my friend with horrified eyes.

Dupin retreated to the fireplace, from which he might address the whole company.

"Now, Madame la Baronne and gentlemen, the time has

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come for explanations. I shall now tell you how I came to be accused of common theft. You have all seen the Parisian newspapers this morning, retailing information supplied by Madame de F——s and her accomplice? No, Madame, your indignation will neither move me nor silence me. Be quiet, pray!"

Dupin picked up the disk that he had laid on the table by his coffee-cup, and held the disk high, so that all might see it.

"Now, you all observe the Jewel of Childeric? How very *outre!*" he laughed; "for, Madame and gentlemen, *you see nothing of the sort.*"

"You mean, sir, that the Jewel of Childeric is *not* a genuine work of Merovingian times?" Monsieur Delaporte cried. "But I—"

"The Jewel, sir, *is* genuine. But *this* is not the Jewel. It is an imitation, made for me by an engraver in the Rue Mazarine. It will not pass close inspection, but, at a distance, it is sufficiently like the real Jewel to be mistaken for it—as indeed, you all, with the sole exception of Monsieur Souvigny, mistook it the other day.

"Let me refresh your memories. Monsieur Delaporte gave the genuine Jewel back to Monsieur Souvigny, then apparently occupied with repairs to the Jewel's case. You all *believed* that you saw him—since he was so busy with the leather case—place the Jewel on the table there, beside a cup of coffee.

"Madame, gentlemen, *he did no such thing.* Monsieur Souvigny put the *real* Jewel in his pocket; what he laid so openly on the table by the coffee-cup was what I have here—a disk of pure, almost completely transparent *confectioner's candy*, skillfully engraved, by a competent gem-cutter, from a design which I supplied—I obtained the design from a book on Merovingian antiquities that I purchased in the Passage St. Germain the other day. The candy, you observe, is as clear as glass—or, shall we not rather say, as rock-crystal?

"Now let us see to which point we have come. Let us reconstruct, as the police say, the events of three days ago.

"Monsieur Souvigny deftly substituted, for the real Jewel that Monsieur Delaporte handed to him, a sugar disk similar to the one now lying on the table. But, by the rules of this plot to discredit and disgrace me, the spurious disk must now be made to disappear."

"But how, Dupin?" I asked.

"Be patient, my dear friend! I shall soon show you. One perceives, by his skillful palming of the real Jewel, and his

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ready substitution of the false one, that Monsieur Souvigny is no stranger to the arts of prestidigitation—and when the English detective police shall have answered the request for Monsieur Souvigny's *dossier*, we shall almost certainly discover something to his discredit not unconnected with sleight-of-hand. But to continue.

"This necessary disappearance of the false Jewel called, however, for no whisking of the disk into a sleeve or secret pocket. Indeed no—but let me show you." And here Dupin picked up the disk of sugar, *and dropped it into his coffee!* "It rather over-sweetens the coffee, I should say," he added, in a conversational tone of voice. "But it is certain that the disk has now entirely disappeared."

"Then where, in Heaven's name, is the *real* Jewel?" G— cried.

"Why, my dear Prefect, where else should it be but—here?—and Dupin, smiling, held up Monsieur Souvigny's old-fashioned "turnip" pocket-watch, swinging it idly by its plaited horse-hair guard. "A certain amount of alteration has been made in the case of this timepiece, but the English watchmakers are known to be adept in these matters. We open it—ah, so! and behind the movement, within the back—yes, here is a cleverly concealed catch—we find a silk-lined receptacle. And, yes, here is the *real* Jewel of Childeric, that I now propose to hand over for safe-keeping to Monsieur Delaporte. Well, Monsieur Souvigny?"

The man shrugged, but remained silent.

"But *when*," G— asked, "did Monsieur Souvigny place the real Jewel in the secret compartment of his pocket timepiece?"

"Why," Dupin answered, "when he set his watch by the mantel-shelf clock. Do you not remember?"

"Of course!"

"And it was because he had somewhat called our attention to the big, old-fashioned timepiece, that its *unusual* size aroused no suspicion in the minds of the searchers, so that, though I am positive that they opened the back, they found nothing—for they were not seeking anything *in* the watch.

"The motive, of course, is patent: revenge. I gathered and supplied evidence against Madame la Baronne in the action brought against her by Monseigneur le Prince Louis de R—n. Somewhere, she recruited this quite dexterous accomplice. The argument that I *might* have stooped to common theft was supplied in Monsieur

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Souvigny's statement that he had decided, after all, *not* to return the Jewel to me—though, as Monsieur G—— knows, the Jewel never belonged to my father or to any other member of my family."

Monsieur Souvigny gave a coarse laugh.

"At least, Monsieur le Chevalier, you must admit that it was a good attempt, even though it did not quite succeed?"

Dupin shook his head. He said contemptuously, "You deceive yourself. It was not even a good attempt. You were betrayed, Monsieur, before you entered my *salon* for the first time—before you even entered our house. No, Monsieur, do not turn that angry regard on the lady who employed you to work her revenge on me—*she* did not give you away. But *I* saw you and heard you angrily rebuke a horse which nuzzled your pocket. I asked myself why a horse usually nuzzles pockets? And, of course, the only answer suggested itself: the horse smells sugar in the pocket.

"Yet, since you were angry with the creature, you were obviously not one of those kindly men who habitually carry sugar for horses in their pockets. Yet the horse *had* smelled sugar in your pocket; *ergo*, you were carrying sugar. And if this sugar was not for a horse for what purpose were you carrying it?"

"Why, then," asked Monsieur Souvigny, who seemed to have recovered his *sang-froid*, "did you permit the *charade* to run its full length? You knew that the searchers had failed to find what you knew I carried—why then did you not denounce me?"

"Because I wished to show Madame la Baronne," and here Dupin made the lady a bow, "that I am not quite the imbecile for which she seems to have mistaken me. Because she sought revenge, and I wished to demonstrate to her that she has not gained it."

"Well, then," said Monsieur Souvigny, rising from his chair, "I suppose that the only thing that I may do is to return to London."

"Pray be seated again, Monsieur," said G——, in a tone of cold civility. "Since Monsieur le Chevalier has informed me that the Jewel was never in his family's possession, I shall have to ask you to accept our hospitality in the Rue de Jerusalem, while we endeavor to discover how so valuable a relic of antiquity—oh, indeed, Monsieur, I find myself warmly accepting your conclusion that it was once part of the ancient Regalia

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of France—*how* so valuable a relic, I repeat, came to be in *your* possession.

"Our inquiries," G—— continued carelessly, "may well take us some time—possibly years—since we already have so many pressing affairs to claim our immediate attention. But do not despair, Monsieur, we shall, I promise you, come eventually to the consideration of your affairs—and in prison, Monsieur, you may care to reflect on the relative intellectual capacities of Madame la Baronne and Monsieur le Chevalier."

The Prefect of the Parisian police made a sign to Sergeant Fournier, and that functionary asked Monsieur Souvigny, with all official civility, to accompany him to that grim house in the Rue de Jerusalem.

So ended, to the discomfiture of the two plotters and the complete restoration of their victim's good name, the first and—to the best of my knowledge—the last attempt to blacken the reputation of my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin.

'Q'

NEXT MONTH . . .

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

With your permission, good friends, may we celebrate this time round with an all-detection month? Anyway, we must; there's no choice. Lacking worthy items in espionage or mystery-adventure, I will back up three new titles with a once-famous old classic. Overall quality can be guaranteed. Dip in anywhere; connoisseur or neophyte, you won't be disappointed.

The volume of short stories called *Judge Dee at Work*, by Robert van Gulik (Scribners, $4.95), recounts eight criminal problems, almost all murder cases, solved by stately Judge Dee during the decade he serves as chief magistrate for four different provinces of the T'ang Empire in ancient China.

The antiquity of this epoch all but staggers imagination. Our first case occurs in 663 A.D., several centuries before England's King Alfred burned those cakes or routed the Danes. Yet human nature seldom changes. In love, hate, greed, or plain cussedness, these distant sons of Orient are not unlike their Occidental counterparts thirteen hundred years later. And clues valid in 663 would still be revealing today.

Judge Dee and his four assistants—Sergeant Hoong, Tao Gan, Chiao Tai, Ma Joong (careful of that last name!)—find wicked ingenuity at every turn. The brutal slaying of Colonel Soo entails its own unique method of using an arrow; it is solved by red tape literal rather than figurative. The murder at the lilypond pavilion Judge Dee solves, as Sherlock Holmes might have solved it, by the incident of the frog in the night-time. In black-bearded Judge Dee, stern yet understanding, the late Robert van Gulik has created a timeless sleuth you will want to meet.

In *Wild Pitch*, by A. B. Guthrie, Jr. (Houghton Mifflin, $5.95), the author of *The Big Sky* takes as his background not the old West, the pioneer West, the shoot-'em-up West which has become three-quarters legend, but what might be everyday life in a small western town today. The gunslingers have gone, if they ever really existed; the sheriff owns a revolver but seldom wears one; gunplay

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of any kind belongs to the hunting season only.

But does it? When Cattleman Buster Hogue is shot through the head at the town's annual picnic, a whole hornet's nest of perplexities torments law and order until the murderer's second victim, ambushed beside his own mail-box, carries torment to near-disaster.

At the scene gather characters from the sophisticated to the bucolic, from culture to semi-literacy or worse; from Professor Hawthorne's daughter to Mrs. Jenkins bawling hymns in the street; from Psychiatrist Dr. Pierpont to half-wit Otto Dacey or vicious old McNair with the moonshine still.

And most easily remembered is Sheriff Chick Charleston, dominating all. Anything but bucolic despite his occasional pose, Charleston scores as both diplomat and detective. Seen through the admiring eyes of young Jason Beard, baseball pitcher and would-be sleuth, Sheriff Charleston becomes almost a folk hero of legend. Writing with humor, insight, and vividness, Mr. Guthrie has enclosed sound detection in the flesh and blood of a fine story.

Next, since the book deserves more space than we have, let there be fervent praise for *Arson and Old Lace*, by Sylvia Angus (World, $5.95). Matt Tregastel, successful artist, returns to paint in Corinth, on the Maine coast. Even as bullying Jay Hoaglin plots to "improve" the old town by destroying historic landmarks, some unknown hand sets a series of maniac fires.

Among inhibited New Englanders Matt falls hard for beautiful Scandanavian Alix, Jay Hoaglin's wife—then his widow. Suspicion of murder can't be escaped. Menace stalks those marble pavements, those eighteenth-century houses, until Matt fits together each clue for the finale. Vivat Caledonia! And a Scots toast to Miss Angus.

Though published as long ago as 1907, and now available only at second or third hand, Gaston Leroux's *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* provides unforgettable blood and thunder. Still the best locked-room novel, it also confronts Reporter-Detective Joseph Rouletabille with the riddle of an adversary who disappears before the eyes of four witnesses.

Any critic dull enough to call this story improbable would apply the same term to folklore or Arthurian romance. It retains its daring, its ingenuity, its charm. And all honest readers must cherish the courtroom scene, "in which it is shown," as one chapter-head says, "that we do not always think of everything."

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Part Two (Conclusion) of a *NEW* article by

JOHN DICKSON CARR

Part Two (Conclusion) of John Dickson Carr's engrossing article on the brutal, notorious English highwaymen of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, as recorded in THE COMPLETE NEWGATE CALENDAR. In this section we meet, among others, Claude Duval, William Cady, and the legendary Dick Turpin . . .

STAND AND DELIVER!
(Conclusion)

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

In May of 1660 King Charles the Second, "the best that ever reigned over us," was restored to the throne of his fathers. Henceforward, for his reign at least, there was a pattern less crude. The highwayman dances to a merrier measure under the Merry Monarch, even when he dances on air. Which leads us inevitably to Claude Duval.

No pop singer of today has made so many feminine hearts flutter as did handsome Claude. Born in France, by trade a footman, he learned much of the English language and still more of polite deportment in the service of British masters in Paris. Not yet 20, already a skilled performer on the flageolet and on females, he crossed the Channel in the Duke of Richmond's household, but soon broke free for other business.

And he became quite a lad; we can't doubt it. His own little gang of highwaymen elected him their leader. In a proclamation listing the malefactors most wanted by the law, Claude's name, like Abou ben Adam's, led all the rest. For indoor work he was a practised card-sharp, and his technique with women proved

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irresistible. "Those eyes of yours, madam, have undone me!" Or, "Oh, that I could by any means in the world recommend myself to your ladyship's notice!" One adventure of his, true or false, has been repeated persistently for 300 years.

To Claude at the Tangier Tavern came word that a certain wealthy knight and his lady would enter town by way of Hampstead Heath, with a cache of £400 in their coach. Under bright moonlight that night, as the coach jolted across the heath, its occupants saw three or four mounted men, Claude's gang, skulking ahead. The lady in the coach with her husband—or her boy friend, this part is not clear—immediately took up a flageolet and played a lively air.

Well, anyway, the story says she did. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* describes the flageolet both as "a small flute blown at the end" and as "a kind of kidney-bean," though we must suppose this lady played the former. Up galloped Claude Duval, resplendent with periwig and feathered hat, himself playing a flageolet in reply.

"Sir," said he to the knight, "your lady plays excellently, and I make no doubt she dances as well. Will you both please to step out of the coach, and let me have the honour of dancing with her on the heath?"

This sounds like Charles Boyer at his best. Down climbed the lady and her escort. Claude, after leading her through one coranto, with great politeness handed the lady back.

"But, sir," pointed out Claude, "you have forgot to pay for the music!"

The poised nobleman, replying that he never forgot such debts, reached under the back seat of the coach; he took out and handed over £100.

"You are liberal, sir," courteously continued Duval, "and shall have no cause to regret it. This hundred so generously given has excused you the other three hundred pounds, which you have with you in the coach at this moment. Keep them safe for your comfort; a good journey, sir, and now good night!"

All right, so they danced in the moonlight; but one question must still provoke curiosity. Who played the flageolet for that impromptu coranto? Was it some member of Claude's gang, another musical virtuoso? Or the accommodating knight who saved 300 of his 400 quid? Whoever piped or whoever paid, they could do things handsomely in good King Charles's golden day.

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Other episodes show Claude in a light less amiable, as when he stripped the trinkets from a whole coachful of ladies and wouldn't even give back a child's silver sucking-bottle. His full story has never been told; it has never been known. The law took him one day when he was drunk, at the Hole-in-the-Wall in Chandos Street. But everybody forgave him when he had been sentenced His levees at Newgate were great social occasions. So was his execution.

They gave him the business at Tyburn on January 21st, 1670. Ladies of quality thronged to the gallows, their eyes blind with tears behind the vizard masks they wore to any dubious spectacle like a hanging or a theatrical performance. Nor did his honours end when his legs ceased to twitch. Borne in a mourning coach to Claude's favourite tavern, his body lay in state in a black-draped room with tapers burning round the bier and black-clad mourners openly weeping. He was buried in Covent Garden Church, itself a social achievement, under a stone with this epitaph:

> Here lies Duval. Reader, if male thou art,
> Look to thy purse; if female, to thy heart.
> Much havoc hath he made of both, for all
> Men he made stand, and women he made fall.

It would please me to linger on the career of William Cady, a true hellion who roved, robbed, and died in the reign of James the Second. Will Cady, son of an eminent surgeon, earned a B.A. at Trinity College, Cambridge. Left impoverished by his father's death, he bought pistols, took to the highway, and showed his mettle first crack out of the box. Riding across Hounslow Heath one summer afternoon in 1685, he overtook two horsemen with whom he fell into talk: a gentleman whose name is not given and one Captain Chevalier, a Frenchman with a commission in the First or Grenadier Guards. Will waited until nobody else was in sight. Without more ado he shot the civilian dead and whirled on the other with an order to stand and deliver.

"I am a captain in the Guards," the Frenchman snapped at him. "Any rogue who wants my money must fight for it."

"If you are a soldier," quoth Will, "you have learned to obey a command. Hand over!"

Roared Captain Chevalier, "You are an unconscionable son of a bitch—"

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In passing, let's consider that term "son of a bitch." Though today never heard in Britain and unknown except as an Americanism, it is in actual fact old English. Characters in the uninhibited novels of Tobias Smollett (1720-1770) frequently wallop out with it. Sir Walter Scott records a conversation alleged to have been held between Dr. Samuel Johnson and Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations.* According to this account, Adam Smith told Dr. Johnson that David Hume, the Scots historian, had died very tranquilly though still abjuring all religious faith. Whereupon Dr. Johnson called Adam Smith a liar, and Adam Smith called Dr. Johnson a son of a bitch. This seems to have been the only meeting or exchange of compliments between the great lexicographer and the great economist.

But we have left Will Cady and Captain Chevalier astride their horses, glaring at each other on Hounslow Heath.

"You are an unconscionable son of a bitch," roared Captain Chevalier, not without reason on his side, "to demand money of me, who never owed you any."

"There's not a man travels the road but owes me money," retorted Will, with less cogent reasoning. "Pay me; pay instantly!"

Captain Chevalier fired from the hip and missed; Will shot the Captain's horse. Now less bold, the Frenchman disgorged. Nailing his victim's coat-tail to a nearby tree (did he carry ironmongery as Claude Duval carried a flute?), Will rode away with a watch, a diamond ring, and a purse of 26 guineas.

Following a too-daring robbery soon afterwards, it is related that he fled abroad and took refuge at an English seminary in Flanders. Our chronicler, much impressed by Will's Cambridge degree, calls him a scholar and says he was "admitted, upon the superior's examination" into the fraternity of Benedictine Friars, where he remained for two years. We may well believe Will had no liking for poverty or chastity, and schemed only to ease out of the seminary as soon as he could raise the cash for getting back to England. It is in explaining Will's departure that the chronicler seems to skid and land on his ear.

Among the fair penitents who had chosen Will Cady for their confessor, he declares, were two young gentlewomen as handsome as they were rich. (Even if the Benedictines let Will stay there, would they have allowed him to hear confessions?) Anyway, the next time these young ladies visited the seminary, it is related, Will heard their confessions separately; then, bringing them together

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and covering both with a pistol, he swore they must hear *his* confession.

He was in great need of money, he said. Unless they supplied him at once, or if they made any noise at all, they should have a bullet for their pains. The girls, terrified, between them yielded up a sum in French money equal to more than £40 sterling, as well as two diamond rings. Will had not finished. Putting both victims on the bed, he debauched them both (double rape again, egad!). He tied them neck and heels, gagged them, and made haste out of the seminary before any alarm could be raised.

Will's subsequent career was as brief as it was violent. In background ranging from Durham to his favourite stamping-ground of Hounslow Heath, in the few months before they caught and hanged him in 1687, one murderous incident blatters after another. On the robbery of a middle-aged hop merchant and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. John Sandal, the chronicler dwells with a horrified fascination easy to understand.

Mr. and Mrs. Sandal were riding one horse across Hounslow Heath when Will accosted them and ordered them to alight. He also dismounted. The hop merchant provided a good haul, some £28 pounds; but the wife had only half a crown. And Will lost his temper.

"Is this your way of travelling?" he yelled. "What! Carry but half a crown in your pocket, when you are to meet a gentleman collector on the highway? But I'll be even with you, madam; therefore off with that ring on your finger."

"Oh, sir," pleaded Mrs. Sandal, "I entreat you to spare my wedding ring. I would not lose this for double its value; I have kept and worn it above twenty years."

By this time Will was raging. "You whining bitch! Marriage be damned, and you, too. What! Because you are a whore by license, must I be more favourable to you than to another woman? Give me the ring this moment without more cant, or," says he, displaying a knife in his left hand, "I'll cut off your finger with the ring on it, as I have served others of your sex before this."

Mrs. Sandal pulled the ring from her finger; but, instead of handing it over, she instantly popped it into her mouth and swallowed it. And Will Cady went completely round the bend. Raving, stamping, he swore he would still send her to the devil without her wedding ring, and forthwith shot her through the head. When she lay dead in the road, with his knife he slit her up

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from navel to chin, and then cut the ring from her innards. This is rough-and-ready surgery with a vengeance, anticipating Jack the Ripper (1888) by almost exactly 200 years.

Let me repeat that I would linger on Will Cady. Or on Edward and Joan Bracey, who kept an inn by day and went forth for highway robbery by night. Or on Jocelin Harwood, so tough a cookie that his own associates feared him and gave him up to the law. Or on half a dozen more of their kind, as the 1690's rolled into the new century. But it is time to end this survey. We are carried forward to the year 1739, and to the most famous highwayman in history. I refer, of course, to Dick Turpin.

No other outlaw-hero has become so celebrated for something he didn't do. Ever since Harrison Ainsworth published the immensely popular novel, *Rookwood*, in 1834, it has become fixed in many minds that Dick Turpin on his mare Black Bess for some reason rode from London to York in one day, and that on reaching York the gallant horse fell dead.

Ainsworth dreamed all this. And yet, though Turpin himself never made the famous ride, it has been maintained that somebody else did: one Samuel Nicks, an earlier outlaw of good King Charles's golden day, who by the king himself was dubbed "Swift" Nicks. The distance from London to York is 188 miles. "Swift" Nicks, it has been claimed, did even better.

At Gad's Hill in Kent, some 20-odd miles *south* of London, Nicks committed a robbery at four o'clock on a summer morning, when it was light enough for his victim to identify him. An alibi must be established, or he was a gone goose.

Crossing the river to Gravesend, Nicks galloped north at such a pace that he reached York in late afternoon, changed his clothes, and appeared on the bowling green to ask what time it was—a quarter to eight—of no less a dignitary than the Lord Mayor. When eventually he was charged with the holdup at Gad's Hill, the jury acquitted him because they wouldn't believe such a feat of horsemanship could be accomplished.

We needn't believe it either. The only authority is Daniel Defoe, who turned out so much fiction disguised as fact that every tale becomes suspect. And that any man covered such a distance in less than 15 hours—on one horse, over the appalling roads of the time—must be considered, as Huckleberry Finn considered the *Pilgrim's Progress*, "statements interesting, but steep."

What was the truth about Turpin? The Newgate Calendar

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features him, and there is a full record of his trial. Both accounts appeared nearly 100 years before Ainsworth's novel credited him with the ride to York.

Our story soars to its climax in the third decade of the bawling, brawling Eighteenth Century. The king was fat little George the Second, jabbering broken English at St. James's Palace; the prime minister was corrupt Sir Robert Walpole, who pretty well proved his thesis that any man may be bought for a price. Rich people could occupy themselves with such stimulating japes as the Hell-Fire Club or with such charmers as Elizabeth Chudleigh, afterwards Duchess of Kingston, who appeared "all but naked" at a public ball. Poor people got fuddled on cheap gin—"drunk for a penny; dead drunk for twopence; straw for nothing"—and scratched a living as best they could. To the latter class Dick Turpin belonged.

He was born in 1706. His father, a country innkeeper, apprenticed him to a butcher in Whitechapel. When his apprenticeship was finished, Dick married a girl named Joan Palmer. Already he had been stealing sheep and oxen. Nearly nabbed for this, he borrowed some money from his wife and joined a gang of smugglers in Essex, with a sideline in stealing deer. The venture brought little profit; Dick, as leader of four other hard nails like himself, set up a career of robbery and terror.

In this they were more successful. Choosing a lonely farmhouse at nightfall, they would knock at the door, burst in when it opened, and rip the place to pieces. At their first try Dick sat an old woman on the grate over the fire to make her tell where the family's money had been hidden. But a reward of 100 guineas was offered for the gang's arrest; in 1735, when the others had been hanged or dispersed, Turpin retreated to Cambridgeshire and joined forces with a highwayman called Tom King.

Tom King was the character who figures in all romances as Turpin's "great friend." A silent film of many years ago, in which the cowboy star Tom Mix played Dick Turpin, sent him through hair's-breadth escapades to rescue his friend from prison. Reality was a little different.

The firm of Turpin & King did fairly well on the highway until Dick stole a fine horse from a landowner in Epping Forest and had it sent to his favourite haunt, the Red Lion in Whitechapel. A constable named Bayes traced the horse there. Bayes crossed the stable-yard and came face to face with Tom King, a much-wanted

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man. Turpin, galloping into the yard at that moment, saw the constable closing in on his friend.

"Shoot him, Dick, or by God we're taken!" Turpin fired, missed the constable, and shot his friend through the chest. King died the next day, perhaps letting slip enough to put the bloodhounds on Dick's track. Turpin fled to Yorkshire, which may have inspired Ainsworth in the next century. Under the name of John Palmer he combined highway robbery with horse-stealing. Arrested for horse-stealing, he was tried before Sir William Chapple at York Assizes in March of 1739, and turned off at Eastertide as another moral lesson for that moral age.

Legend dies hard. Round London there are still places associated with the name of Dick Turpin. At York, up to a generation ago at least, they would point out to you the exact spot on which Black Bess fell dead under her master. Most of the highwaymen mentioned here, even the most bloody-minded, have shown some spark of imagination or picturesqueness. Turpin showed none; anyone who called *him* a son of a bitch could have pleaded full justification.

Whether or not we are all lawbreakers at heart, certain it is we cherish them whenever we can. It has been done in America with the Western bad man, even with the gangster; England will always have Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. Sixty years ago there was a toast much given at convivial gatherings. Our band of highwaymen never heard it. Two, perhaps three, of its desiderata they never attained or could have hoped to attain. Yet it seems probable that Isaac Atkinson, Zachary Howard, Claude Duval, William Cady, even Turpin himself, would have raised their glasses right lustily to

A long life and a merry one,
A quick death and an easy one,
A true girl and a pretty one.
A cold drink—and another one.

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a NEW crime story by

ROBERT BLOCH

The phrase "crime story" means something different to Robert Bloch—something different from what it means to every other writer of crime stories. You'll see what we mean when you read "See How They Run"...

We've often wondered: has Robert Bloch ever written a story that doesn't have something special about it?...

SEE HOW THEY RUN

by ROBERT BLOCH

April 2nd

Okay, Doc, you win.

I'll keep my promise and make regular entries, but damned if I'll start out with a heading like *Dear Diary*. Or *Dear Doctor*, either. You want me to tell it like it is? Okay, but the way it is right now, Doc, beware. If you've got any ideas about wading in my stream of consciousness, just watch out for the alligators.

I know what you're thinking. "Here's a professional writer who claims he has a writer's block. Get him to keep a diary and he'll be writing in spite of himself. Then he'll see how wrong he is." Right, Doc? Write, Doc?

Only that's not my real problem. My hangup is the exact opposite—antithetical, if you're looking for something fancy. Logorrhea. Verbosity. Two-bit words from a dime-a-dozen writer? But that's what they always say at the studio: writers are a dime a dozen.

Okay, so here's your dime. Run out and buy me a dozen writers. Let's see—I'll have two Hemingways, one Thomas Wolfe, a James Joyce, a couple of Homers if they're fresh, and six William Shakespeares.

I almost said it to Gerber when he dropped me from the show. But what's the use? Those producers have only one idea. They point at the parking

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lot and say, "I'm driving the Caddy and you're driving the Volks." Sure. If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?

Call it a rationalization if you like. You shrinks are great at pinning labels on everything. Pin the tail on the donkey, that's the name of the game, and the patient is always the jackass. Pardon me, it's not "patient," it's "analysand." For fifty bucks an hour you can afford to dream up a fancy word. And for fifty bucks an hour I can't afford not to word up some fancy dreams.

If that's what you want from me, forget it. There are no dreams. Not any more. Once upon a time (as we writers say) there was a dream. A dream about coming out to Hollywood and cracking the television market. Write for comedy shows, make big money in your spare time this new easy way, buy a fancy pad with a big swimming pool, and live it up until you settle down with a cute little chick.

Dreams are nothing to worry about. It's only when they come true that you've got trouble. Then you find out that the comedy isn't funny any more, the big money disappears, and the swimming pool turns into a stream of consciousness. Even a cute little chick like Jean changes to something else. It's not a dream any more, it's a nightmare, and it's real.

There's a problem for you, Doc. Cure me of reality.

April 5th

A little-known historical fact. Shortly after being wounded in Peru, Pizarro, always a master of understatement, wrote that he was Incapacitated.

Damn it, Doc, I say it's funny! I don't buy your theory about puns being a form of oral aggression. Because I'm not the aggressive type.

Hostile, yes. Why shouldn't I be? Fired off the show after three seasons of sweating blood for Gerber and that lousy no-talent comic of his. Lou Lane couldn't get a job as M.C. in a laundromat until I started writing his material and now he's Mr. Neilsen himself, to hear him tell it.

But that's not going to trigger me into doing anything foolish. I don't have to. One season without me and he'll be back where he belongs—a parking attendant in a Drive-In Mortuary. Curb Service. We Pick Up and Deliver. Ha, ha.

Gerber gave me the same pitch; my stuff is getting sour. We don't want black comedy. It's nasty, and this is a family-type show. Okay, so maybe it

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was my way of releasing tension, getting it out of my system—catharsis, isn't that the term? And it made me come on a little too strong. Which is where you get into the act. Blow my mind for me, put me back on the track, and I'll get myself another assignment and make with the family-type funnies again.

Meanwhile, no problems. Jean is bringing in the bread. I never figured it that way when we got married. At first I thought her singing was a gag and I went along with it. Let the voice coach keep her busy while I was working on the show—give her something to do for a hobby. Even when she took the first few club dates it was still Amateur Night as far as I was concerned. But then they hit her with the recording contract, and after the singles came the album, etc. My little chick turned into a canary.

Funny about Jean. Such a nothing when I met her. Very good in the looks department but aside from that, nothing. It's the singing that made the difference. Finding her voice was like finding herself. All of a sudden, confidence.

Of course I'm proud of her but it still shakes me up a little. The way she takes over, like insisting I see a psychiatrist. Not that I'm hacked about it, I know she's only doing it for my own good, but it's hard to get used to. Like last night at the Guild screening, her agent introduced us to some friends of his—"I want you to meet Jean Norman and her husband."

Second billing. That's not for me, Doc. I'm a big boy now. The last thing I need is an identity crisis, right? And as long as we're playing true confessions, I might as well admit Jean has one point—I've been hitting the bottle a little too hard lately, since I got canned.

I didn't mention it at our last session, but this is the main reason she made me come to you. She says alcohol is my security blanket. Maybe taking it away would fix things. Or would it?

One man's security blanket is another man's shroud.

April 7th

You stupid jerk. What do you mean, alcoholism is only a symptom?

First of all, I'm not an alcoholic. Sure I drink, maybe I drink a lot, everybody drinks in this business. It's either that or pot or hard drugs and I'm not going to freak out and mess up my life. But you've got to have something to keep your head together and just because I belt a few doesn't mean I'm an alcoholic.

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But for the sake of argument, suppose it does? You call it a symptom. A symptom of *what?*

Suppose you tell me that little thing. Sitting back in that overstuffed chair with your hands folded on your overstuffed gut and letting me do all the talking—let's hear you spill something for a change. What is it you suspect, Mr. Judge, Mr. Jury, Mr. Prosecuting Attorney, Mr. Executioner? What's the charge—heterosexuality in the first degree?

I'm not asking for sympathy. I get plenty of that from Jean. Too much. I'm up to here on the oh-you-poor-baby routine. I don't want tolerance or understanding or any of that phony jive. Just give me a few facts for a change. I'm tired of Jean playing Mommy and I'm tired of you playing Big Daddy. What I want is some real help, you've got to help me help me please please help me.

April 9th

Two resolutions.

Number one, I'm not going to drink any more. I'm quitting as of now, flat-out. I was stoned when I wrote that last entry and all I had to do was read it today when I'm sober to see what I've been doing to myself. So no more drinking. Not now or ever.

Number two. From now on I'm not showing this to Dr. Moss. I'll cooperate with him completely during therapy sessions but that's it. There's such a thing as invasion of privacy. And after what happened today I'm not going to lay myself wide open again. Particularly without an anesthetic, and I've just given that up.

If I keep on writing everything down it will be for my own information, a matter of personal record. Of course I won't tell him that. He'd come up with some fancy psychiatric zinger, meaning I'm talking to myself. I've got it figured out—the shrinks are all authority figures and they use their labels as putdowns. Who needs it?

All I need is to keep track of what's happening, when things start to get confused. Like they did at the session today.

First of all, this hypnotherapy bit.

As long as this is just between me and myself I'll admit the whole idea of being hypnotized always scared me. And if I had any suspicion the old creep was trying to put me under I'd have cut out of there in two seconds flat.

But he caught me off guard. I was on the couch and supposed to say whatever came into my head. Only I drew a blank, couldn't think of any-

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thing. Emotional exhaustion, he said, and turned down the lights. Why not close my eyes and relax? Not go to sleep, just daydream a little. Daydreams are sometimes more important than those that come in sleep. In fact he didn't want me to fall asleep, so if I'd concentrate on his voice and let everything hang loose—

He got to me. I didn't feel I was losing control, no panic, I knew where I was and everything, but he got to me. He must have, because he kept talking about memory. How memory is our own personal form of time travel, a vehicle to carry us back, way back to earliest childhood, didn't I agree? And I said yes, it can carry us back, carry me back, back to old Virginny.

Then I started to hum something I hadn't thought about in years. And he said what's that, it sounds like a nursery rhyme, and I said that's right, Doc, don't you know it, *Three Blind Mice.*

Why don't you sing the words for me, he said. So I started.

Three blind mice, three blind mice,
See how they run, see how they run!
They all ran after the farmer's wife,
Did you ever see such a sight in your life
As three blind mice, three blind mice?

"Very nice," he said. "But didn't you leave out a line?"

"What line?" I said. All at once, for no reason at all, I could feel myself getting very uptight. "That's the song. My old lady sang that to me when I was a baby. I wouldn't forget a thing like that. What line?"

He started to sing it to me.

They all ran after the farmer's wife,
She cut off their heads with a carving knife,

Then it happened.

It wasn't like remembering. It was happening. Right now, all over again.

Late at night. Cold. Wind blowing. I wake up. I want a drink of water. Everyone asleep. Dark. I go into the kitchen.

Then I hear the noise. Like a tapping on the floor. It scares me. I turn on the light and I see it. In the corner behind the door. The trap. Something moving in it. All gray and furry and flopping up and down.

The mouse. Its paw is caught in the trap and it can't get loose. Maybe I can help. I pick up the trap and push the spring back. I hold the mouse. It wiggles and squeaks and that scares me more. I don't want to hurt it, just put it outside so it can run away. But it wiggles

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and squeaks and then it bites me.

When I see the blood on my finger I'm not scared any more. I get mad. All I want to do is help and it bites me. Dirty little thing. Squeaking at me with its eyes shut. Blind. Three Blind Mice. Farmer's wife.

There. On the sink. The carving knife.

It tries to bite me again. I'll fix it. I take the knife. And I cut, I drop the knife, and I start to scream.

I was screaming again, thirty years later, and I opened my eyes and there I was in Dr. Moss's office, bawling like a kid.

"How old were you?" Dr. Moss said.

"Seven."

It just popped out. I hadn't remembered how old I was, hadn't remembered what happened—it was all blacked out of my mind, just like the line in the nursery rhyme.

But I remember now. I remember everything. My old lady finding the mouse head in the trash can and then beating the hell out of me. I think that's what made me sick, not the bite, even though the doctor who came and gave me the shot said it was infection that caused the fever. I was laid up in bed for two weeks. When I'd wake up screaming from the nightmares, my old lady used to come in and hold me and tell me how sorry she was. She always told me how sorry she was—after she did something to me.

I guess that's when I really started to hate her. No wonder I built so many of Lou Lane's routines on mother and mother-in-law gags. Oral aggression? Could be. All these years and I never knew it, never realized how I hated her. I still hate her now, hate her—

What I need is a drink.

April 23rd

Two weeks since I wrote the last entry. I told Dr. Moss I quit keeping a diary and he believed me. I told Dr. Moss a lot of things besides that, and whether he believed me or not I don't know. Not that I care one way or the other. I don't believe everything he tells *me*, either.

Hebephrenic schizophrenia. Now there's a real grabber.

Meaning certain personality types, confronted with a stress situation they can't handle, revert to childhood or infantile behavior levels.

I looked it up the other day after I got a peek at Moss's notes, but if that's what he thinks, then he's the one who's flipped.

Dr. Moss has a thing about words like flipped, nuts, crazy.

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Mental disturbance, that's his speed.

That and regression. He's hung up on regression. No more hypnosis—I told him that was out, absolutely—and he got the message. But he uses other techniques like free association, and they seem to work. What really happens is that I talk myself into remembering, talk my way back into the past.

I've come up with some weirdies. Like not drinking a glass of milk until I was five years old—my old lady let me drink that formula stuff out of the bottle and there was a big hassle over it when I went to kindergarten and wouldn't touch my milk any other way. Then she clouted me one and said I made her ashamed when she had to explain to the teacher, and she took the bottle away. But it was her fault in the first place. I'm beginning to understand why I hated her.

My old man wasn't any prize, either. Whenever we had company over for dinner he'd come out with things I'd said to him, all the dumb kid stuff you say when you don't know any better, and everybody would laugh. Hard to realize kids get embarrassed, too, until you remember the way it was. The old man kept needling me to make stupid cracks just so he could take bows for repeating them to his buddies. No wonder you forget things like that—it hurts too much to remember.

It still hurts.

Of course there were good memories, too. When you're a kid, most of the time you don't give a damn about anything, you don't worry about the future, you don't even understand the real meaning of things like pain and death—and that's worth remembering.

I always seem to start out that way in our sessions but then Moss steers me into the other stuff. Catharsis, he says, it's good for you. Let it all hang out. Okay, I'm cooperating, but when we finish up with one of those children's hours I'm ready to go home and have a nice, big drink.

Jean is starting to bug me about it again. We had another hassle last night when she came home from the club date. Singing, that's all she's really interested in nowadays, never has any time for me.

Okay, so that's her business, why doesn't she mind it and let me alone? So I was stoned, so what? I tried to tell her about the therapy, how I was hurting and how a drink helped. "Why don't you grow up?" she said. "A little pain never hurt anyone."

Sometimes I think they're all crazy.

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April 25th

They're crazy, all right.

Jean calling Dr. Moss and telling him I was back on the bottle again.

"On the bottle," I said, when he told me about it. "What kind of talk is that? You'd think she was my mother and I was her baby."

"Isn't that what you think?" Moss said.

I just looked at him. I didn't know what to say. This was one time when he did all the talking.

He started out very quietly, about how he'd hoped therapy would help us make certain discoveries together. And over a period of time I'd begin to understand the meaning of the pattern I'd established in my life. Only it hadn't seemed to work out that way, and while as a general thing he didn't care to run the risk of inducing psychic trauma, in this case it seemed indicated that he clarify the situation for me.

That part I can remember, almost word for word, because it made sense. But what he told me after that is all mixed up.

Like saying I have an oral fixation on the bottle because it represents the formula bottle my mother took away from me when I was a kid. And the reason I got into comedy writing was to reproduce the situation where my father used to tell people all my funny remarks—because even if they laughed it meant I was getting attention, and I wanted attention. But at the same time I resented my father taking the credit for amusing them, just like I resented Lou Lane making it big because of what I wrote for him. That's why I blew the job, writing material he couldn't use. I wanted him to use it and bomb out, because I hated him. Lou Lane had become a father image and I hated my father.

I remember looking at Dr. Moss and thinking he has to be crazy. Only a crazy shrink could come up with things like that.

He was really wild. Talking about my old lady. How I hated her so much when I was a kid I had to displace my feelings—transfer them to something else so I wouldn't feel so guilty about it.

Like the time I got up for a drink of water. I really wanted my bottle back, but my mother wouldn't give it to me. And maybe the bottle was a symbol of something she gave my father. Hearing them was what really woke me up and I hated her for that most of all.

Then I went into the kitchen and saw the mouse. The mouse reminded me of the nursery

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rhyme and the nursery rhyme reminded me of my mother. I took the knife, but I didn't want to kill the mouse. In my mind I was really killing my mother—

That's when I hit him. Right in his dirty mouth.

Nobody talks about my mother that way.

Apr 29

Better this way. Don't need Moss. Don't need therapy. Do it myself.

Been doing it. Regression. Take a little drink, take a little trip. Little trip down memory lane.

Not to the bad things. Good things. All the warm soft memories. The time I was in bed with the fever and mother came in with the ice cream on the tray. And my father bringing me that toy.

That's what's nice about remembering. Best thing in the world. There was a poem we used to read in school. I still remember it. "Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight, make me a child again just for tonight!" Well, no problem. A few drinks and away you go. Little oil for the old time machine.

When Jean found out about Dr. Moss she blew her stack. I had to call him up right away and apologize, she screamed.

"To hell with that," I said. "I don't need him any more. I can work this thing out for myself."

"Maybe you'll have to," Jean said.

Then she told me about Vegas. Lounge date, three weeks on the Strip. All excited because this means she's really made it—the big time. Lou Lane is playing the big room and he called her agent and told her it was all set.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Lou Lane set this up for you?"

"He's been a good friend," Jean told me. "All through this he's kept in touch, because he's worried about you. He'd be your friend, too, if you'd only let him."

Sure he would. With friends like that you don't need enemies. My eyes were opening fast. No wonder he squawked to Gerber and got me off the show. So he could move in on Jean. He had it set up, all right. The two of them, playing Vegas together. Jean in the lounge, him in the big room, and then, after the show—

For a moment there I was so shook up I couldn't see straight and I don't know what I would have done if I could. But I mean I really couldn't see straight because I started to cry. And then she was holding me

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and it was all right again. She'd cancel the Vegas date and stay here with me, we'd work this out together. But I had to promise her one thing—no more drinking.

I promised. The way she got to me I would have promised her anything.

So I watched her clean out the bar and then she went into town to see her agent.

It's a lie, of course. She could have picked up the phone and called him from here. So she's doing something else.

Like going straight to Lou Lane and spilling everything to him. I can just hear her. "Don't worry, darling, I had to beg off this time or he'd get too suspicious. But what's three weeks in Vegas when we've got a whole lifetime ahead of us?" And then the two of them get together—

No. I'm not going to think about it. I don't have to think about it, there are other things, better things.

That's why I took the bottle. The one she didn't know about when she cleaned out the bar, the one I had stashed away in the basement.

I'm not going to worry any more. She can't tell me what to do. Take a little drink, take a little trip. That's all there is to it.

I'm home free.

Later

She broke the bottle.

She came in and saw me and grabbed the bottle away from me and she broke it. I know she's mad because she ran into the kitchen and slammed the door. Why the kitchen?

Extension phone there.

Wonder if she'll try to call Dr. Moss.

Aprel 30

I was a bad boy.
The Dr. come. he sed what did you do.
I sed she took the bottel away.
He saw it on the floor the knive
I had to do it I sed.
He saw blood.
Like the mouse he sed.
No not a mouse. A canarry.
dont look in the trash can I sed
But he did.

'Q'

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GEORGES SIMENON

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MAIGRET AND THE FRIGHTENED DRESSMAKER

by GEORGES SIMENON

"Inspector Maigret, believe me I know I have no right to disturb you while you are on leave, especially in view of all I have heard of your charming country house on the banks of the Loire.

"But you will forgive me, will you not, when I tell you that it is a matter of life and death to me? I am alone in the heart of Paris. The crowds are milling around me.

"I go about my everyday affairs, like any other girl, yet at any moment something dramatic may happen: a bullet from God knows where, a knife in the back maybe.

"The crowd will see me fall to the ground; my body will be carried into some pharmacist's shop or other, before its final journey to the mortuary.

"It will cause no great stir; at most, a small paragraph in the

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papers. Nevertheless, Inspector, I want to live! Do you understand? I am young! I am healthy! I hunger for all the joys of life!

"You will, no doubt, be astonished to receive this letter at your retreat, whose whereabouts is such a closely guarded secret. You should know, therefore, that I am the niece of the man who worked with you for years at Police Headquarters, and who died at your side.

"I beg you, sir, do not ignore my appeal: give up a few days to me, a few hours even! It is a young girl who is pleading with you from the depths of her heart, going on her knees to you because she does not want to die.

"I shall be on the terrace of the Café de Madrid at ten o'clock on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. I shall be wearing a little red hat. Anyway, I shall recognize you, because I have a photograph of you taken with my uncle.

"S.O.S.! S.O.S.! S.O.S.!"

Maigret was furious, primarily because his first reaction, whenever he let himself be talked into anything, was to fly into a rage with himself.

Besides, for no good reason, he had been reluctant to mention the letter to his wife, and he was a little ashamed of having to invent an excuse for returning to Paris.

Further, his eagerness to keep this appointment showed that he was not quite as happy on holiday just cultivating his garden as he wanted people to believe.

The first hint of a mystery and he was all agog, like a little boy. Another thing, as often happens in life, there was a trivial and somewhat absurd physical cause for his ill-temper.

When he set out from Meung-sur-Loire at seven in the morning there was a chilly mist hanging over the valley, and Maigret had put on his winter coat. But now, as he sat on the terrace of the Café de Madrid, the Grands Boulevards were sparkling in the May sunshine and everyone was wearing spring clothes.

For one thing, he mused, it's a stilted letter; it doesn't ring true. As for the colleague killed at my side shortly before I retired, it can't be anyone but Sergeant Farel and he never mentioned any niece to me.

The terrace was deserted. He was alone at his table, and having already had his coffee at the Gare d'Orleans he did not feel like drinking; but finally he ordered a beer.

With any luck, she won't come, and I'll be able to catch the eleven o'clock train back!

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At the precise moment when the hands of the electric clock at the Montmartre crossroads moved to ten o'clock, a little red hat was weaving in and out of the crowd, and a few seconds later a young woman sat down next to Maigret, who was at once aware that she was breathing heavily.

"Forgive me," she gasped, pressing her hand over her pounding heart. "I'm so scared the whole time."

She turned her face toward him, forcing a smile, and added, "but that's all over now you're here. I promise I'll be good."

All this had happened in a matter of seconds, and Maigret had not yet recovered from his surprise at finding this small vivacious creature sitting beside him, fidgeting nervously with her crocodile handbag.

The waiter, watching them, asked, "What will you have?"

"Something strong, if you don't mind," she said.

"Brandy?" suggested Maigret.

"If you like. I was sure you'd come. What scared me was the thought that you might not be in time."

"Farel was your uncle?"

"Yes, I thought you'd guess. Actually I'm his great-niece. I didn't put my name and address in the letter because I don't trust the mail."

As she spoke, she was staring at something, or rather at someone—a young man who had just come onto the terrace and sat down at a table a little way off.

Maigret saw a flicker of pain in the girl's eyes and he said in a somewhat surly tone, "Is that the man?"

"Who?"

"That chap over there."

But she recovered herself, smiled, and said, "No, you're on the wrong track. It's just that the very sight of a young man, especially if he's wearing a tan raincoat, gives me a start. I can't help myself."

He noticed she did not empty her glass at one gulp, but drank slowly, taking small sips every now and then. He also observed the young man's amused and slightly contemptuous expression, and it struck him that it might well seem to an outsider that Maigret was giving an impression of a middle-aged gentleman with an eye for a pretty girl.

"My name is Berthe," said the girl, who did not seem to care much for silence. "I'm twenty-eight. Now that you've agreed to help me, I'm ready to tell you the whole story."

In her red hat she was as radiant as spring itself, but all the same, he thought, here was a little madam who knew what

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she wanted and meant to get it.

"Because you will take care of things for me, won't you, monsieur?"

"I don't know what it's all about yet."

"You will! I'll tell you everything."

Was it because of the young man that she was so uneasy? She was darting looks all over the place. Her glance followed people threading their way through the crowds, came back to Maigret, rested on the glass of brandy, moved to the young man. And she smiled the whole time, a forced, nervous smile.

"Would you mind very much coming to my place? It's not very far from here. Rue Caulaincourt in Montmartre. If we take a taxi we'll be there in no time."

Maigret, still disgruntled, feeling that he was being made to look ridiculous, flung a coin on the table, and as he left the terrace, noticed that the young man in the tan raincoat was calling for his bill.

The address was Number 67A, not far from the Place Constantin-Pecqueur, between a baker's shop and a coal merchant's. A typical Montmartre house with its concièrge's lodge near the entrance, a worn reddish carpet on the stairs, yellowish fake marble walls, and two doors to every floor, each with its bronze doorknob.

"I'm terribly sorry about all these stairs. I'm afraid it's right at the top, on the sixth floor, and there's no elevator."

When they reached her landing, she took a key from her handbag, and all at once they were in another world. There had been signs of spring in the Grands Boulevards, but it was a pale and insipid spring compared with what was to be seen spread out beneath this little flat, perched high above the rooftops of Paris.

Below was the Rue Caulaincourt, with its stream of buses and trucks like a dark river, and one could only feel pity for the people going to and fro, so far from the fresh air and sunshine.

French windows opened out onto a long iron balcony filled with geraniums which seemed blood-red in the sunlight. A canary was hopping about in a cage, with scraps of chickweed between the bars left over from the morning.

"Do take your coat off, monsieur. Forgive me, I must just run a comb through my hair. I don't know how I got dressed this morning. I couldn't put my mind to anything, wondering if you'd come."

All the doors were open. He could see the entire flat. There were three rooms, pleasantly

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furnished and scrupulously clean with a lot of brightly colored fabrics about, which gave the place an even more festive air.

Mlle. Berthe, who had taken off the jacket of her suit, was wearing a yellow blouse printed with little flowers, which outlined the curve of her bust.

"Give me your coat. Do please sit down. I don't know whether I'm coming or going. I'm so happy, do you see! I feel as if I had wakened out of a nightmare."

And indeed she looked radiant. Her eyes were moist and shining, her full red lips parted in a smile.

"You'll soon see . . . I don't know where to begin, but that won't matter, will it? After all, you're used to it. You took one look at this room and the sewing machine and the lengths of material, and guessed I was a dressmaker.

"And I'll let you into a secret—most of my work is copying models from the big fashion houses. I have some very elegant customers and that's what they all want. You won't give me away will you?"

She was bubbling over with vitality, so much so that she left him no time to think, scarcely time to take in the many fleeting expressions that enlivened her face. And, once more, Maigret had a twinge of uneasiness at being here in these surroundings redolent of femininity and youth, like a married man kicking over the traces.

"Now, I have another confession to make, a more serious one. I hate talking about it, but I can't help myself. I could never have told my uncle Farel . . . Well, monsieur, here it is; I'm not a good girl. I have, or rather I had, a friend . . . And it's all because of him that—"

Maigret was no longer uneasy, he was dumfounded. How could he have been so simple as to take this case seriously, even for an instant?

A silly romantic girl whose lover had uttered threats, hoping to frighten her into going back to him!

Breathlessly Mlle. Berthe went on, "I met him last year at St. Malo where I was on holiday. He's a young man of good family. His father was in business, but he went bankrupt through no fault of his own. All his life, as the child of rich parents, he'd had everything he wanted; then, all of a sudden, at the age of twenty-three he had to earn his living."

"What does he do?" Maigret asked, sounding skeptical.

"In St. Malo, he sold cars for a big firm—or rather, he tried to sell them. Business was slow.

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And Albert—that's his name—Albert hates pestering people. Soon after I got back to Paris he turned up and started looking for a place of his own."

"Forgive me. Did he live here?"

And Maigret's eyes turned toward the bedroom door through which he could see a mirror-fronted wardrobe and a highly polished wood floor.

"No," she said, "I didn't want that. He had a small room in a hotel on the Rue Lepic. He came here often but only in the daytime."

"Was he your lover?"

She flushed, nodded, and, getting up, asked Maigret if he would care for a glass of wine.

"I only have white. A sweet Bordeaux. I can't even remember where I put it. I'm half out of my wits these days . . . Look, do you mind if I cut it short, because I know I'll only get worked up again.

"The long and the short of it is, I was wrong about Albert. It didn't take me long to realize that he wasn't seriously looking for a place of his own, and that he was spending most of his time in disreputable bars.

"Several times I saw him with some shady characters. Do you follow me?"

She moved about restlessly. Her voice sounded muffled. It would not have taken much to make her burst into tears.

"It's a week now since it happened. You'll have read about it in the papers, though I daresay it didn't mean much to you.

"That night four young men broke into a radio-television shop in the Boulevard Beaumarchais. They didn't bother with any of the heavy stuff. What they were after was the cash they knew—God knows how—was in the till. They took sixty thousand francs. Just as they were making their getaway, they were seen by a police patrol. One of them fired a shot and killed a policeman."

Suddenly Maigret was himself again. He looked, all at once, more thickset, more impressive. Mechanically he began lighting his pipe which, up to now, he had not dared even to take out of his pocket.

"What next?" he said, in a tone that was as yet unfamiliar to Mlle. Berthe.

"Two of the gang were arrested—a couple of characters well known to the police by their nicknames, Le Grele and Le Marseillais. Young chaps, kids really.

"Their headquarters are somewhere near the Place Blanche. Albert used to go there a lot."

"Who fired the gun?" Maigret asked, staring at the

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canary through a haze of pipe smoke.

"They don't know," she said, her voice rising. "Or rather, they found the revolver on the pavement. It was Albert's revolver, no mistake about that. It was a gun he had been given by his father. It had Albert's name on it.

"The father came forward when he read about it in the papers. He's been to headquarters at the Quai des Orfèvres and made a statement."

"And Albert?"

"They're still looking for him. You know better than I do how these things are done. I suppose they've sent his description all over the country. And that's why—"

She dried her eyes and went onto the balcony for a moment, turning her back on Maigret. He could see her shoulders shaking, as though she were sobbing.

When she turned round she looked pale and drawn.

"I could have gone to the police and told them the truth, but I was scared," she said, her voice rising again. "You're different. I trust you, Monsieur Maigret. I know you won't give me away. Here, you'd better see this."

She lifted the lid of a fake Rouen soup tureen which stood on the table, took out a letter, and handed it to Maigret. It was written in purple ink in a sprawling hand. Maigret read:

"My own little Berthe,

"As you will see from this letter, I am in Calais. I have to get away from here, out of the country, as soon as possible. But I've made up my mind I won't go without you. So here I am, waiting for you. I'll be watching the personal columns of the *Intransigeant*. Just put 'Albert' and the day and the time, and I'll meet you at the station in Calais.

"I give you fair warning that if you go to the cops with this letter, I'll know how to get my own back. What I did, I did for you. So you see where your duty lies.

"I shall hold you responsible for whatever may happen to me. Another thing, I warn you that I don't intend to go alone, and I'll see to it that no one else gets you.

"Try to understand.

"Albert."

"Why didn't you go to Calais?" Maigret asked, looking innocent.

"Because I have no wish to be wife or mistress of a murderer. I thought I loved Albert. I took him for a decent young man down on his luck. I did all I could to help him."

Her lower lip was trembling. She was on the verge of tears again.

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"I realize now that all he wanted was my money, and that's still all he's after. Because he knows I've got quite a bit put by—over fifteen thousand francs in Trustee Savings."

The tears now poured down her cheeks.

"He never loved me, do you see? And I'm so terribly unhappy, and scared! I don't want to go to him. The thought that he—that he—"

Maigret got up clumsily and patted Mlle. Berthe on the shoulder. She was resting her elbows on the table, with her face in her hands, weeping bitterly.

But she quickly regained her composure. "Someone from the police has been here asking questions. They all but arrested me as an accessory—I didn't mention the letter because, if I had, I'm sure they'd have put me through it.

"But I'm frightened! I'm positive he'll come back and do something dreadful to me! Once, just because the cat brushed against his legs, he grabbed hold of it so roughly that it's been lame ever since.

"I would have done anything for him. If you had seen him, you would have thought, as I did, that he was—"

"That young man on the terrace of the Madrid, was he really a stranger to you?"

"I swear it."

"That puzzles me."

"Why?"

He had gone out onto the balcony. He was looking down on the Place Constantin-Pecqueur. And there, mounting guard at the corner of the Rue Caulaincourt, he could see the tan raincoat.

"I don't know. Just a hunch . . ."

"What's in your mind? Tell me. Promise, monsieur, that you'll protect me. I must know where Albert is . . . If only I could be sure he was over the frontier!"

"What would you do?" Maigret growled.

"I'd breathe more freely. If he's not, I'm certain he'll kill me, as he—"

Here, Maigret felt, was the very essence of the little world of Montmartre, with its industrious people, demanding so little, delighting in small things. On a table in the kitchen he could see a cutlet and a carton of celery salad bought at a dairy, which with a cream cake on a blue pottery plate she would have for her lunch.

Next to the sewing machine was a half-finished dress, an organdie evening dress with a pattern of spring flowers. In a china bowl were pins and buttons, a pencil, a piece of tailor's chalk, and a few postage

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stamps. A very ordinary life, in fact, in this sunlit room, with its balcony high above the town.

Mlle. Berthe sniffed and looked up, making no apology for her red nose and tear-stained cheeks.

"I know I'm muddle-headed and I say things just as they come into my head. But that doesn't alter the fact that, unless you help me—I'm certain, do you hear?—one of these days you'll find me in the mortuary.

"He was my first love, monsieur. Till I met him, believe it or not, I was a good girl. I just wanted to get married and have children! Children more than anything! And now—"

"I'll see what I can do, child," Maigret promised, sounding gruff because he had a horror of emotional outbursts.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, however, than she seized his hand and kissed it.

"Thank you, Inspector. But tell me one other thing. I'm not a monster, am I? I did love him, it's true, but I gave my love to the decent young man I believed him to be.

"I'm not betraying him. I don't wish him any harm. I wouldn't tell the police a thing. Surely that proves it.

"As for you, you're different. I appealed to you for protection, because I was afraid, because I'm too young to die."

Maigret had moved away from Mlle. Berthe, and standing on the balcony he turned his back on her. The smoke from his pipe was like a halo around his head.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "Of course, I'll pay for everything. I'm not rich but, as I said, I have a little money saved."

"That house just opposite—it's a hotel, isn't it?"

"Yes, the Hotel Concarneau."

"Fine, I'll probably take a room there. If I may give you one word of advice, go out as little as possible."

"I won't go out at all if you say so, except to do my shopping."

"Can't you arrange for the concièrge to do it for you?"

"I'll ask her."

"I'll come and see you sometime this evening. Pity you don't know that young man."

"What young man?"

"The one who followed you to the Café de Madrid and who's mounting guard now on the corner of the street."

"Unless—" she began, her eyes widening.

"Unless?"

"Unless Albert sent him.

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Suppose he persuaded a friend to—"

"I'll see you later," growled Maigret, making for the door.

He was not satisfied, though he could not have said why. On the landing he removed a piece of white sewing cotton from his sleeve. And going down the flights of stairs, he was still undecided as to what he should do.

The minute he caught sight of him, the young man in the raincoat dived into a bistro on the corner of the square.

Maigret went in after him, ordered a large beer, and, seeing that the telephone booth commanded a view of the room, went into it, leaving the door open.

"Hello! Police Headquarters? Put me through to Inspector Lacroix, please. Yes, Jerome Lacroix. His uncle Maigret speaking. Hello! Is that you, son? How are you?

"What d'you say? To hell with it. Your business can wait. Hop into a taxi and come over for a chat. I'm in the Rue Caulaincourt. Hang on . . ." He put his head round the door and said to the proprietor, "What do you call this place?"

"The Zanzi-Bar."

"At the Zanzi-Bar . . . Yes, I'll wait . . . Of course not. Your aunt is as fit as a fiddle. Me, too. See you later."

As he returned to the bar, Maigret thought he detected a flicker of ironic amusement in the gray eyes of the young man, who was dressed in a light suit, brown-and-white shoes, and a snakeskin belt.

The young man suggested to the proprietor, "Have a go with the poker dice?"

"I can't spare the time."

"What about you, monsieur? Try your luck?"

Maigret seemed about to refuse; then, changing his mind abruptly, he seized the box and shook it menacingly, as though he already had his companion in handcuffs.

"Three kings!" exclaimed the young scoundrel, after throwing the dice.

And, with a quick sideways look at Maigret, who was picking up the dice, he added, "Your throw, Monsieur Maigret!"

Maigret threw a pair of nines. Making his second throw he said, "Do you know me?"

"One knows one's classics, does one not?" the young man replied smoothly. "Three jacks. You'll leave them? What will you drink? I don't suppose there was much on offer up there, except that sickly wine of hers that tastes like blackcurrant syrup!"

There was only one way of dealing with this kind of

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situation: keep a cool head and, above all, show no signs of irritation. Maigret went on smoking his pipe in short puffs, then took a second match, for his innocent-looking opponent had just thrown three queens.

"You really don't remember me? Well, I ask you, and after that grilling I had from you, too—nine at night till five in the morning!"

He was enjoying himself hugely. He was a good looker, and he knew it. Above all, he could, when it suited him, smile so disarmingly that it was almost impossible to be angry with him.

"A dope case—cocaine—still not with me? It was a few years back. I was a busboy at the Célis in the Rue Pigalle and you had made up your mind I was to be your stool pigeon. Three kings! That's better. Good. Pass me a match."

His manner was at once casual and bantering. He ordered an apéritif and returned to the attack.

"Well, what did you make of my little sister?"

The bistro was empty, except for a solitary drunk who persisted in feeding coins into the slot machine. The proprietor was taking advantage of the lull to fill a couple of pails with the dregs from the bottles.

"I'll bet it didn't take you long to twig her little game, did it?"

Maigret had not heard this kind of gutter talk while he was on holiday and he could almost have smiled.

"With all due respect and quite between ourselves, you didn't let yourself get talked into anything, I hope?" said the younger man.

Let him babble on. To gain time, Maigret could always take a sip of beer or tap out his pipe.

"I guessed she'd be at her old tricks again pretty soon. When they're working up to that sort of thing, you can spot the signs way ahead. But I never figured she'd pester a big shot like you. Watch out, Monsieur Maigret. That's a queen, not a jack . . . Full house! Will you leave them?"

He shook the dice.

"Four kings! You're out of luck, aren't you? To get back to my little sister, it's not her fault if she's a bit touched, as they say. Even as a kid she had to have treatment for sleepwalking." And looking toward the door he exclaimed, "Well, well, here's your colleague. Maybe I had better leave you two on your own."

At the door he stood back to make way for Jerome Lacroix who had just got out of a taxi. The two men stood face to face, the young scamp still

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wearing his disarming smile, the policeman from the Quai des Orfèvres frowning.

"Hello, Uncle. What's that fellow doing here?"

"Who is he?"

"P'tit Louis. You must have known him when he was a busboy round the Montmartre night clubs. Fancies himself as a comic, but I'll catch up with him one of these days."

Jerome Lacroix, who had got his job at Police Headquarters through Maigret, was a large bony young man with thick hair and a stubborn expression. He had a long nose, small eyes, and enormous hands and feet.

There was an air of sadness and obstinacy about him and one felt that rather than fail in his duty, even in small things, he would let himself be hacked into little pieces.

"Come and sit over here in the corner, son," said Maigret, choosing a table where he could keep an eye on Number 67A. "D'you know his sister?"

"Whose sister? P'tit Louis? As a matter of fact, I was at her place only a couple of days ago."

Lacroix's reply was an unpleasant shock, but Maigret gave no sign of it.

"You are talking about Mlle. Berthe?"

"That's right. She's a dressmaker. She lives just across the street."

"What do you know about this Mlle. Berthe?"

And it was with some satisfaction that Maigret noted that his nephew had very little to tell him.

"She's a dressmaker."

"So you've just told me."

"She's the mistress of a man called Albert Marcinelle. He's wanted for shooting a policeman in the Boulevard Beaumarchais."

"Is that all?"

"Hang it, that's all I could get out of her. She's very proud. The concièrge thinks the world of her. Except for this chap Albert, she's never had a man in her flat, not even her brother. In fact, she chucked him out for good and all. All the same . . . Somehow or other. . . This isn't what you're in Paris for, is it?"

"Yes."

Surprised, Jerome stared thoughtfully at his glass. He could not see anything in this business to interest his uncle, who had repeatedly refused to be bothered with cases far more important than this one.

"You know what I think. We'll catch up with him sooner or later, and that'll be the finish. He's nothing but a little tick—not worth bothering about. We've sent his descrip-

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tion all over the country and it wouldn't surprise me—"

"You should try a message in the *Intransigeant.*"

Jerome was by now completely baffled, and showed it.

"A message for him?"

"Take this down: 'Albert Wednesday 3:17.' Have a policeman at the station in Calais to meet that train."

"You think Albert will be at the station at Calais?" asked Jerome.

"I'll lay you ten to one he *won't,*" said Maigret.

"Well then?"

"Well then, nothing! Give a kiss to your wife and son from me . . . Wait a bit though. If there should be any developments I'd appreciate it if you'd ring me at the Hotel Concarneau. It's three doors up."

"Au revoir, Uncle."

Maigret, as he paid for the drinks, no longer looked weighed down, as he had done that morning; for it seemed to him that the pieces were beginning to fit together.

Briefly, as he saw it, the case from one point of view—that of the police—was too simple; and from the other—Mlle. Berthe's—too complicated.

Not far from the bistro there was a small restaurant for truck drivers. There was a terrace with two tables, and as one of them was unoccupied, Maigret sat down at it. There was veal and sorrel stew on the menu, one of his favorite dishes.

The air was so full of spring, the sweet-scented breeze so warm, that, together with the Beaujolais he had ordered, it sent the blood to his head, and made him think with longing of a siesta on the grass with a newspaper over his head.

At two o'clock Maigret went into the Hotel Concarneau and succeeded, not without some difficulty, in getting a front room on an upper floor, exactly opposite Mlle. Berthe's balcony.

When he went to the window he almost blushed. The girl was busy fitting a dress, and in the bluish half light he could see her client with almost nothing on.

He could not rid himself of the suspicion that she had done it deliberately, that she had perhaps seen him in his room. On the other hand, considering the weather, was it not to be expected that the girl would keep the windows wide-open?

Maigret virtually never took his eyes off her, and she did not make a move or a sign that was not perfectly natural.

When the first fitting was over, she began work on a blue dress, patiently putting it together, removing the pins one by one from between her lips, kneeling for a long time beside

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a dummy covered in black canvas.

Then she poured herself a glass of water, worked at the sewing machine, raised her head as though she had heard a knock at the door, and brought in another customer who had a length of material with her.

From Maigret's vantage point it was possible to lip-read most of their interchange. He gathered that they were discussing the price, and that it was the customer who finally gave in.

It was about four o'clock when at last it struck Maigret he ought to let his wife know he would not be home that night, and possibly not for several days.

He rang for the chambermaid, and handed her a telegram. At the same time he ordered a bottle of beer. He had had Brie at lunch after the stew, and it had made him thirsty.

"Either this girl is one in a thousand," he grumbled to himself, chewing his pipestem, "or else—"

Or else what? What on earth was he doing here? Why had he not caught the eleven o'clock train back as he had originally intended?

Suppose she's telling the truth, as she could be, on the face of it.

Yes! Well, if that was the case, what could he do? Act the guardian angel, like those private detectives in America who trail round after nurses and children as a protection against gangsters?

It might drag on for a long time. Albert did not seem in any hurry to return to Paris and kill his mistress, and it struck Maigret suddenly that he did not even know what Albert looked like.

And suppose she was lying? What other motive could she have had in appealing to him? Why lure him to this corner of Paris, with its population of small tradesmen, just when he had got into holiday mood in the country?

Leaving his coat in his room, he went downstairs and called at the lodge of Number 67A.

"Is Mlle. Berthe at home?" he asked the concièrge.

"I'm sure she is. She's got so much work at the moment, I'm even doing her shopping for her. Would you be good enough to take this letter for her as you're going up there?"

He recognized Albert's handwriting and noted that the letter was postmarked Boulogne.

"So!" he grunted, starting up the stairs. There was the answer to one of his questions at any rate.

He knocked. He was kept

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waiting a short while, and when she did open the door he was ushered into the kitchen to wait. She was busy with another fitting.

The kitchen was clean, like the rest of the flat. In a corner stood a half-empty bottle of white Bordeaux and a dirty plate.

He heard a voice say, "It needs taking in a little at the waist. Yes. That's it. It's always younger-looking. When will you have it ready for me?"

"By next Monday."

"You couldn't make it sooner?"

"I'm sorry—it's such a rush at this time of the year, with everyone wanting new things in a hurry."

At last Mlle. Berthe let him in with a sad smile.

"You see," she said. "I try so hard to keep cheerful. After all, life must go on in spite of everything. But I can't tell you how desperately worried I am, or was, rather, because now you're here—"

"I have a letter for you."

"From him?"

He handed it to her.

She read it, dry-eyed but with trembling lips. Then she passed it over to him.

"Dear old thing,

"I'm getting to the end of my tether. I warn you. I won't be able to stick it much longer. I daren't hang about in Calais the whole time—they'd be on to me there. I keep on the move. I had lunch at Boulogne today, and I'm not sure where I'll spend the night. But make no mistake, if you don't come I'll do as I said, even if it means getting pinched.

"It's up to you.

"Albert."

"You see!" she said. She sounded dispirited.

"What does your brother say about it?"

She did not flinch or show any surprise. She merely looked profoundly sad.

"He spoke to you?"

"We had a drink together."

"I'd have done better to tell you the whole truth this morning. After all, he's not so bad, really. But he's always been on his own, even as a child. He loves acting the shrewd boy, but honestly, he couldn't hurt a fly. All the same I had to stop him from coming here because of the way he carries on."

"Still, you lied to me this morning."

"I didn't want you to get ideas."

"What sort of ideas?"

"Oh, I don't know. That he and I were two of a kind! You might have refused to help me." She pointed to the letter.

"You've read it. He mailed it

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yesterday. There was nothing to stop him getting on the next train and coming here."

It was growing cooler, and the sun had disappeared behind the houses. Mlle. Berthe shut the windows, then came back to Maigret.

"Can I get you a cup of tea? No? As you see, I work hard. I've always kept myself, built up my business on my own. When I met Albert I thought: this is happiness!"

She was holding back her tears as she set about mechanically folding the materials that were spread about the room.

"Haven't you any women friends?" he asked, looking at a photograph of a fair-haired girl on the mantelpiece.

She followed his glance.

"There was Madeleine. But she's married now."

"Don't you see anything of her nowadays?"

"She lives in the provinces. Her husband is an important man. To me Albert was—"

"Could you let me have a photograph of him?"

She did not hesitate for an instant.

"Of course, you wouldn't know him if you saw him!" she exclaimed. "Wait a minute. I have a photograph that was taken in St. Malo. On the beach."

She got it out of the soup tureen where, it seemed, she kept all her treasures. It was a small snapshot, of the kind people take at the seaside.

Albert, in white trousers and with a white linen hat on his head, looked exactly like any other young man on the sands. Mlle. Berthe stood very close to him, as if she were keeping a tight hold on her happiness for fear of losing it.

"Isn't it dark? As soon as the sun goes down it gets very gloomy in here. I'll turn the light on."

No sooner had Mlle. Berthe pressed the switch than there was a knock at the door. It was the concièrge with a basket of food.

"Here you are, Mademoiselle Berthe."

"Leave it in the kitchen, please, Madame Morin."

"The lettuce is lovely, but about the gruyère I had to—"

"We'll go into it later."

And when they were alone once more she sat down, threaded a needle, and put on her thimble.

"What did the police say? You didn't tell them about the letters, I hope?"

He paused deliberately before answering. She looked up, and went on a little incoherently, "Forgive me, I don't know much about how these things

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are done. When I wrote to you I supposed it was rather like going to a lawyer. Was I right?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know about professional secrecy. I told you everything, I showed you the letters. Oh, believe me, it won't worry me in the least if he's caught. In fact, I won't have a minute's peace until he is! But I don't want to be the one. So, you see, if they're looking for him now in Calais or Boulogne . . ."

She was floundering, and he was not being in the least helpful. She began tacking the hem of a dress with intense concentration.

"What would you prefer?" Maigret asked gently.

"How do you mean?"

"Do you want him arrested or out of the country?"

She looked at him, her eyes clear and full of trust.

"How do you feel about it?" he said.

"What will happen to him if he's caught? What exactly will he have to face?"

"If it's proved . . . Well, if he fired the shot, then, of course, it would mean the guillotine."

She turned her head away, biting her lips.

"Well, in that case, I'd rather he got away. Even though he might come back at any time to get me. And if I refused to go with him he might—"

Maigret was still holding the photograph of the girl and her lover, and he was looking with particular interest at the face of the young man, a very ordinary face, framed by a mop of curly hair.

"You, of course, haven't written to him?"

"How could I write to him when I don't know his address? And, anyway, what should I have to write about?"

It was hard to believe, in these peaceful surroundings, that they were on the brink of a precipice. At times Maigret could almost imagine that he was in his own home, with Mme. Maigret sitting opposite, darning socks or sewing, for there was the same tranquillity, the same diffused light, the same personal possessions, each in its proper place, and the same cleanliness.

There was just one difference. Mlle. Berthe was younger, prettier, and more charmingly and tastefully dressed.

"Did he never sleep here?" he asked, to make conversation.

She replied, with touching artlessness.

"Not at night."

"Because of the concierge?"

"And the neighbors, too. Next door there's an old couple. They're very strait-

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laced. There was a girl on a floor below. A lot of men used to go to her rooms. The old couple wrote to the landlord and he gave her notice."

Once again she pulled herself up, remembering she was the hostess. "Are you really sure you won't have anything? What do you drink as a rule?"

"I assure you I don't want anything. I'm beginning to think you have been worrying unnecessarily."

He was pacing up and down now, as it was his custom when questioning witnesses in his office at the Quai des Orfèvres. He was touching everything mechanically, fidgeting with this and that, playing with the pins in the china bowl, straightening the soup tureen.

"As I see it, when he realizes there's nothing to hope for, he'll try to cross the Belgian frontier, and that will be the end of it." Maigret spoke confidently.

"Do you think he'll make it?"

"That depends. Obviously, the customs and police will have his description. But, if he were to take one of the routes that smugglers use—"

"Is it easy, that way?"

"On the contrary, I'd say it was extremely difficult, because it's a center for tobacco smuggling on a very big scale. Come now, you might as well confess it, you still love him, don't you?"

"No!"

"All the same, if I were to tell you he had been caught you would burst into tears."

"What else could you expect? After all, for ten months . . ."

"Yes, indeed, almost a lifetime," he murmured, not altogether unfeelingly. "Now I'm going to leave you."

"So soon?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of. I won't be far away. Just across the street in the Hotel Concarneau. My room's opposite. Oh, by the way, this afternoon I saw several of your clients in their underthings, and one without—"

"I had no idea . . ."

Mlle. Berthe's hand, as she put it into his, felt soft and warm. "I trust you," she sighed with a hint of sadness. "Tonight, for the first time, I'll go to sleep with a quiet mind."

On the narrow staircase Maigret seemed like a lumbering giant. On the pavement, where it was still light, he almost bumped into P'tit Louis.

The young man touched his light gray hat with mock deference and said banteringly, "Beg pardon, Inspector."

At this Maigret felt a sudden surge of ill-temper. It was as

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though he were being sucked down into a bog. He must get free, at whatever cost, free from the absurd mess he had got himself into.

"Come here, you."

"You want to get your revenge at poker dice? At your service!"

"What do you say to a short trip to Headquarters at the Quai des Orfèvres?"

"Not a very smart move."

"Well, smart or not, I want you to come with me and answer a few questions that Inspector Lacroix will put to you"

P'tit Louis was not enthusiastic.

"Shall we go by subway?" he asked.

"We'll take a taxi."

Maigret had never been in such a ridiculous predicament before, and it occurred to him that if his wife had seen him a few minutes earlier in Mlle. Berthe's flat she would have found it hard to believe he was there in the course of duty.

He scarcely believed it himself!

"Get in. Quai des Orfèvres, driver. Yes, the cop shop."

P'tit Louis was too cheeky by half, but Jerome would know how to make him talk, and then they would know where they stood. As to Mlle. Berthe, it was hard to believe she was in any real danger—if Albert was really where he was supposed to be, shuttling between Calais and Boulogne.

"You know the way? Turn right, here. It's the last door, at the end of the passage."

It was the office that Maigret had occupied in his early days.

"Wait here a minute."

Jerome was in there, writing a report.

"I've brought you that young scamp for grilling. He knows more than you'd think."

"Very well, Uncle."

The lad was brazening it out as usual. He had kept his hat on and had taken the liberty of lighting a cigarette.

Maigret removed it from between his lips.

"See here, young fellow. Would you care to tell me where you were on the night of the theft in the Boulevard Beaumarchais?"

"What night was the theft in the Boulevard Beaumarchais?" asked P'tit Louis.

"Late Monday night and early Tuesday morning," said Maigret.

"What month?" He was playing the fool. Maigret almost regretted the days now past when it would have been permissible to teach him a lesson.

"Where was I? Wait a minute. I think there was a

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Marlene Dietrich film at the flick house on the corner of the Rue Rochechouart."

"And then?"

"Then? Let me think . . . There was a cartoon and one of those shorts about plant life on the ocean bed."

Jerome, for his part, would have patiently endured hours of questioning. But Maigret had stood enough.

"Were you in on it?"

"In on what?"

"The job."

"What job?"

He did not know how near he came to getting Maigret's fist full in the face. But Maigret controlled himself.

"Have you an alibi?"

"A good one. I was in bed."

"Where were you? At the movies or in bed?"

"First I went to the flicks, then to bed."

Maigret had brought others of his sort to heel, but his nephew was showing signs of uneasiness.

"You wouldn't by any chance be the fourth joker—the one that got away?"

"No, I swear it!"

At that moment the telephone rang. Jerome took up the receiver, and frowned. "What do you say? Are you sure?"

He hung up, rose, seemed undecided about what to do with P'tit Louis, and then, leaving him in his office, led Maigret out into the corridor.

"It's the Security Branch. Someone's knocked out a woman on the sixth floor at—"

"67A Rue Caulaincourt," interrupted his uncle.

"That's right. The concièrge says she saw a man leave the building. He was bleeding profusely. The stairs are covered with blood."

In the flat Jerome Lacroix turned to his uncle, looked at him uncertainly, and mumbled, "What do you think, Uncle?"

He kept doing this, he could not help himself.

Maigret could not help himself either when, with a shadow of a smile which gave his words an enigmatic flavor, he replied, "You know very well, son, that I never *think.*"

He was doing his best to be inconspicuous. For a long while he remained seated in a remote corner of the room, near the dressmaker's dummy, puffing at his pipe with an abstracted air.

There were people on every landing, and the policeman on guard had difficulty in keeping them out of the flat. Another policeman, on the doorstep downstairs, kept protesting ineffectively, "But I tell you, there's nothing to see!"

Quite a few residents of the Rue Caulaincourt went without

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dinner that night, keeping watch in the street or at their windows. True, the weather was perfect, and from time to time a shadow could be seen moving across the blinds in the flat of the sixth floor.

There was an ambulance parked in front of the building. It was there for almost an hour and then, to everyone's astonishment, it drove away, empty.

"What do you think, Uncle?"

They were faced with a problem.

Mlle. Berthe, who had regained consciousness, was refusing to go to the hospital. She was weak, having lost a great deal of blood from a scalp wound, but there was determination in her eyes and in her clenched moist hands.

"That's the doctor's business," Maigret replied, determined not to interfere.

Lacroix asked the doctor, "Do you think she could be left here?"

"She'll need a couple of stitches, but apart from that a good night's sleep should put her right."

As was to be expected, the place was in an uproar.

But the injured girl was blind to everything but Maigret. Her imploring eyes never left his face.

"You heard the concièrge's statement, Uncle? I think myself that this is what happened: Mlle. Berthe went out, probably to do her shopping—"

"No," said Maigret quietly.

"You think not? Then what did she go out for?"

"To mail a letter."

Jerome was puzzled. How could Maigret be so sure about it? But he could find that out later.

"Well, it isn't important."

"It's very important. But go on."

"She had just left the house when the concièrge saw a man come into the building. It was dark in the passage. The concièrge took him for a friend of one of the tenants. Mlle. Berthe came back almost at once."

"There's a mailbox a hundred yards away in the Place Constantin-Pecqueur," said Maigret, dotting the i's and crossing the t's for his own satisfaction.

"Of course," said Jerome. "Anyway, she went up to her flat. She found this man in there. He attacked her and she defended herself. The man, seriously wounded—to judge from the trail of blood—went downstairs and the concièrge saw him running down the street clutching his stomach with both hands."

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Jerome looked about him with an air of anxiety, then said somewhat uncertainly, "The snag is that the weapon is nowhere to be found."

"Weapons!" Maigret corrected him. "A blunt instrument, with which Mlle. Berthe was struck, and another weapon, probably a knife, used in the attack on the man."

"He must have taken them with him?" ventured Jerome.

Maigret turned his head to hide a smile.

Orders had already been given to search the district for a wounded man. The doctor had finished dressing the girl's head wound. In spite of the pain she had, with an obvious effort, kept her eyes on Maigret the whole time.

"Do you think it could have been her lover?"

"Who did what?"

"Who came here and attacked her."

"Certainly not."

"What would you do in my place?" asked Jerome.

"As I'm not in your place, it's hard to say."

"This is my plan: the doctor is sending a nurse along shortly, to sit with the patient. And I'm posting a man at the front door. We'll see how things stand in the morning and decide about the interrogation then."

The girl had overheard. She was still watching Maigret, and she was almost certain that he had responded to her silent plea with a tiny wink.

For hours she had been fighting off exhaustion. Now, reassured at last, she could give way to it.

The doorways of the nearby houses were still crowded with spectators when the two men, uncle and nephew, left the building. As they walked past, followed by curious stares, Maigret refilled his pipe.

"What about having a bite to eat?" he suggested. "If I'm not very much mistaken, we missed our dinner. There's a brasserie just along the street, and I must say a plate of their sauerkraut and sausages . . . You can ring your wife from there."

All through the meal Jerome kept glancing at his uncle, like a schoolboy scared of being caught. And gradually this soured his temper so that he began to feel almost spiteful toward Maigret, who was altogether too smug, too sure of himself.

"You seem to find this business amusing!" Jerome remarked, helping himself to sausage.

"It certainly has its comic side!" said Maigret.

"Maybe it has, if you don't happen to be the one in charge!"

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Maigret ate with relish. With his broad shoulders and heavy build, and the inimitable zest with which he gulped his beer, he looked like an advertisement for a brewery.

As he wiped his mouth he said, with a feeling of satisfaction that was not entirely devoid of malice, "I've got it."

"What?"

"The solution to the mystery."

"You know who attacked Mlle. Berthe?" asked Jerome.

"No," said Maigret.

"What then?"

"The identity of the attacker is of no importance—of no importance to me, I mean, or to her."

Jerome looked sulkier still. If not for his deep respect for Maigret he would have lost his temper outright.

"Thanks," he growled.

"What for?"

"For making a fool of me, instead of helping me. If you really have found out anything—"

But his uncle refused to be drawn out. He was his old ponderous, impassive self again. He ordered another portion of sauerkraut with a pair of Frankfurt sausages, and a third glass of beer.

"You might at least tell me whether you think I've done the right thing."

"You did what you thought best, didn't you?"

"She's got a nurse with her."

"Yes."

"And there's a man at the door."

"You bet there is."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing."

Maigret paid for the dinner and declined his nephew's invitation to go home with him for coffee.

And half an hour later Maigret was at his window in the Hotel Concarneau. Across the street a feeble light filtered through the blind of Mlle. Berthe's window, and he saw the shadowy figure of the nurse slumped in an armchair, reading. Below on the pavement there was a policeman on guard, and every quarter of an hour he looked at his watch.

"Let her do her own dirty work!" grumbled Maigret, shutting the window.

And as he sat on the edge of the bed, taking off his shoes, he added, thinking of his nephew, "And he can get on with it, too!"

The room across the way was bathed in sunlight when, at nine o'clock the next morning, he came toward Mlle. Berthe's bed. The nurse was tidying the room.

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"I've come to say goodbye," he said, looking deceptively innocent. "Your precious Albert has had his chance and failed. I don't think you have anything more to fear."

As he spoke, he saw anxiety, desperation even, in the eyes of the injured girl. She made an effort to lift herself up, trying to locate the nurse. Then she stammered, "Don't go yet, I implore you!"

"You really want me to stay?"

"Yes."

"You're not afraid, for instance, that I might drop a hint or two to my poor baffled nephew?"

There was something at once churlish and paternal in his manner this morning, though. Mlle. Berthe did not know whether to laugh or cry. She was watching him intently. She had been feverish last night. She could have misinterpreted his wink.

The presence of the nurse was an added complication, for the girl could not speak freely in her presence.

"By the way," Maigret asked, "did you get a letter this morning?"

She shook her head.

"You'll get one tomorrow," he said with conviction. "Oh, yes, you will! A letter posted from Calais or Boulogne. And I'll tell you another thing: there'll be two tiny pinpricks in the stamp."

He smiled. Standing there in the sun, he was playing with the china bowl as he had done the night before, the bowl where she kept her pins and buttons and postage stamps.

There was no need to pursue the point. Mlle. Berthe's face was very pink. She understood.

Once more she looked for the nurse, but Maigret nodded toward the kitchen, and then she heard the hiss of the gas stove.

"You know the tenants across the passage?" he asked, changing the subject abruptly. "You mentioned an old couple, did you not? Do they keep a servant?"

"No, the woman does her own housework."

"What about her shopping?"

"Yes, she does that, too, every morning between nine and ten. I know she goes to the market on the Rue Lepic, because I've seen her there several times."

"And the husband?"

"He goes out with her and spends the whole morning browsing at the bookstalls in the Boulevard Rochechauart."

"Leaving the flat conveniently empty," Maigret concluded in an unnecessarily loud voice.

And once again the injured

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girl did not know whether to laugh or cry. She was still not sure that Maigret was on her side. She dared not speak.

"Would you believe it," he went on cheerfully, but still at the top of his voice, "they've put a guard at the front door. And do you know what his orders are?"

His remarks did not seem to be addressed to Mlle. Berthe—in fact, he had his back to her.

"To stop you, if you should take it into your head to go out, and to prevent your enemies from getting in. I said getting *in*, please note! What the police are afraid of is that someone may come and finish you off in your bed."

Thereupon he opened the window wide, tapped his pipe against his heel, and refilled it.

Then followed a rather long silence. Both the girl and Maigret, it seemed, were waiting for something to happen. Maigret, on edge, was prowling on the balcony. He paused to look down into the street, then shrugged impatiently.

Between clenched teeth, he exclaimed furiously, "Young idiot."

Suddenly he stood stock-still, staring into the street. Weak as she was, Mlle. Berthe almost leaped out of bed.

The nurse looked from one to the other, wondering what it was all about. It would not have taken much to convince her that both were slightly mad.

"Heavens above!" sighed Maigret. "There's the subway on the corner and a bus stop not fifty yards away. And, as if that wasn't enough, here comes a taxi on the lookout for a fare! Well, what about it?"

This time Mlle. Berthe could not stop herself from asking, "Has he gone?"

Crossly he said, "He's certainly taking his time about it. Is he tied by the leg, or what? Well, about time, too!"

"Bus?"

"Subway."

Maigret came back into the room, went to the kitchen to fetch the bottle of wine, and sighed as he poured himself a glass. "If only it was a dry wine!"

Mlle. Berthe could no longer hold back her tears. The nurse tried to comfort her.

"Try to be calm, mademoiselle. You'll make yourself ill. I assure you, it's not a serious injury. You mustn't upset yourself."

"Idiot!" mumbled Maigret.

A ray of sunlight flickered across the sheets as Mlle. Berthe wept uncontrollably, and this half-wit of a nurse could not see that she was weeping for joy.

As soon as the doctor arrived, Maigret took up his hat

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and left without a word. But he did not leave the district. Nonchalantly, as though he had all the time in the world, he strolled along to the Zanzi-Bar.

A little while later he watched his nephew go by, on his way to pester Mlle. Berthe with a lot of questions.

Suddenly P'tit Louis came into the bar. When he saw Maigret he started backing away, but he was stopped by Maigret, who called out, "I'm here for a return match of poker dice. Let's have the dice, *patron* . . . An *Anis* for monsieur. You will have an *Anis*, P'tit Louis? . . . You begin. Three queens. Not good enough, I'm afraid. There, what did I tell you? Three kings . . . Here's your match."

And without the slightest pause he leaned over toward his opponent, who was doing his best to look unconcerned, and said, "The money—was it in the soup tureen?"

P'tit Louis shook his head.

"Was the money in Albert's pocket then?" demanded Maigret.

A vigorous shake of the head, then P'tit Louis said, "When he made off that night he ran along the quays and threw it into the Seine."

"You're sure?"

"I swear to it!"

"Well then, what was this man after, last night?"

"He wouldn't believe me."

Maigret smiled. It was an unforgettable moment, not so much because of the spring weather, the sunshine, the play of brilliant light on the Rue Caulaincourt, and the cool beer, as because he had heard all he needed to set his mind at rest.

It was such a relief that he suddenly felt feverish, realizing for the first time the danger he had escaped.

Now he could go back to his wife, knowing he had backed a winner.

"Who fired the shot?"

"Le Marseillais. He had Albert's revolver."

Maigret saw his nephew, sunk in gloom, emerge from Number 67A and make for the bus stop a few yards from the Zanzi-Bar, and laughed to himself.

"What are you going to do?" P'tit Louis asked anxiously, the dice box still in his hand.

"Me? I'm going to say goodbye to your sister, then catch a train."

The bus went by with Jerome Lacroix on it.

Maigret crossed the street and when he got to the sixth floor found the nurse busy packing.

"She doesn't need me now," she announced. "The doctor will call once a day, and the

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concièrge will look in from time to time."

Maigret's eyes were shining with pleasure. He wandered all over the place, feeling thoroughly at home, waiting for the nurse to leave. He could recall few cases which had given him as much pleasure as this one, and yet, as cases went, there was really nothing to it. What was more, he would never be able to talk about it.

He remembered his reaction after reading Mlle. Berthe's letter at Meung-sur-Loire.

It's a funny thing, he had thought at that time. In a way she strikes me as genuine, and in a way she doesn't.

And he had formed the same impression of the young woman in the red hat whom he had met on the terrace of the Madrid. She was genuinely frightened, one could tell, but when she spoke of the terror that her lover roused in her he had the feeling that she was lying.

She could not speak Albert's name in the right tone of voice. Try as she might, she sounded too gentle, too tender.

Why then had this determined young woman had the presumption to drag Maigret away from his country retreat? And why had she chosen to show him, rather than the police, the letters from Boulogne and Calais?

In the beginning he was baffled. He was even more baffled later when, standing at his window, he watched her calmly fitting her customers' dresses, as though she had nothing in the world to fear.

It was the postage stamps in the china bowl which first set him on the right track, and he had marked them with a pin to test his theory.

"Why are you smiling, monsieur?"

"I might ask you the same thing."

They were alone now. The nurse had gone. They could hear, far off, the clatter of the busy street, and already there was a faint smell of hot tar in the air, a sure sign of summer in Paris.

Maigret, however, was trying hard to look solemn and, assuming his most portentous manner he said, "Do you realize that if I had found the sixty thousand francs here and if Albert had been the one who fired the shot, I'd have had you both locked up?"

"But you were, in a manner of speaking, working for me."

"Precisely! That's how I saw it. I realized that you had appealed to me not to save you from your precious Albert, but to save Albert from himself. And if you had loved him just a fraction less, I swear I'd have

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hauled him out of his hiding place last night."

"I don't see what my lover—" she murmured, blushing.

"I daresay you don't, but there it is. This is how I argued it out with myself. Here's a young woman with a colossal nerve, but I have a feeling she's straight. She's doing all she can to save this young man who's got himself into a mess.

"She wants to save him because she loves him. What's more, I'm certain that if this chap had really killed anyone, her love would have turned to horror."

"He swore on my life, Inspector, that he had not fired the shot. Besides, I was a bit to blame for the whole thing. I knew he was seeing a lot of my brother, and I knew the sort of riffraff *he* was mixed up with.

"Albert couldn't find anywhere to live in Paris and he wanted to marry me as soon as possible. The temptation was too much for him. The others—I hope I never set eyes on them—took him along to keep watch. One of them asked him for his revolver, in case anything went wrong.

"Then the policeman came on the scene and they all made a dash for it. In the general confusion they stuffed the money into Albert's hand and dropped the revolver."

"I know."

"He arrived here at three in the morning looking like death. I got the whole story out of him. He swore he'd thrown the money into the Seine. He begged me to hide him."

"I know."

"How did you guess where he was?"

"First, I made sure that you didn't have a cellar or an attic. Then I noticed that when you were talking to me, you would raise your voice from time to time, as though you wanted someone else to overhear.

"Originally, this floor was one large flat. When it was split up into two, they didn't take away the communicating door, but merely put in another on this side, so you have a door on each side of the wall and a space between.

"Albert was in there. Only—

"Only I was certain the police, having been here once, would come back and search the house. I couldn't be sure that it wasn't being watched. The only way to find out . . .

"You appealed to me, knowing that I'd keep you informed about the official inquiry. I was brought in as a kind of blind. I diverted suspicion from your flat.

"That's how it looked to me. You're a very smart girl."

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"Oh, monsieur," she murmured shyly, "I had to do something for Albert, didn't I? The others would never have admitted the truth. He'd have been the fall guy, or whatever they call it. Especially as they refused to believe we didn't have the money. I knew that through my brother."

"He was doing his best for you! Last night you went out to mail the letter to your girl friend in Boulogne." He pointed to the girl's photograph.

"With Albert's letter to you enclosed. You had arranged for Madeleine to mail the threatening letters back to you. While you were out, one of the gang broke into your flat and searched for the money.

"You interrupted him and he knocked you out with a cosh. Albert came out of hiding and went for him with a knife. Have I got it right?"

He knew perfectly well he had it right. He knew why the weapons had vanished, too. Albert had taken them into his hiding place.

"I bet they're still there," he growled.

He opened the communicating door and, as he expected, found a rubber cosh and a bloodstained knife.

"Where are you meeting him?" he asked, looking round the room for his hat.

She hesitated, then stammered, "Do I have to tell you? Can I be sure you won't—?"

At this he burst out laughing.

"Have you both arrested at the frontier? Is that what you mean?"

"No, but—"

"But you love your precious Albert so much—isn't that it?—that the thought that anyone else might—"

He was at the door. He turned the knob.

"The fact is, you're jealous. Oh, yes, you are, Mlle. Berthe! And jealous of me, what's more, because you wanted to save him all by yourself.

"And while we're on the subject there's nothing to stop you from getting out of bed, wound and all, the minute my back's turned and taking the train to Brussels. And I wouldn't mind betting that before very long someone will be opening a boutique called 'Paris Models' there. Au revoir, Mlle. Berthe."

And because, in spite of everything, he could not resist the temptation to score a point, he added as he went through the door, "I'll send you my bill."

(Translated from the French by Eileen Ellenbogen)

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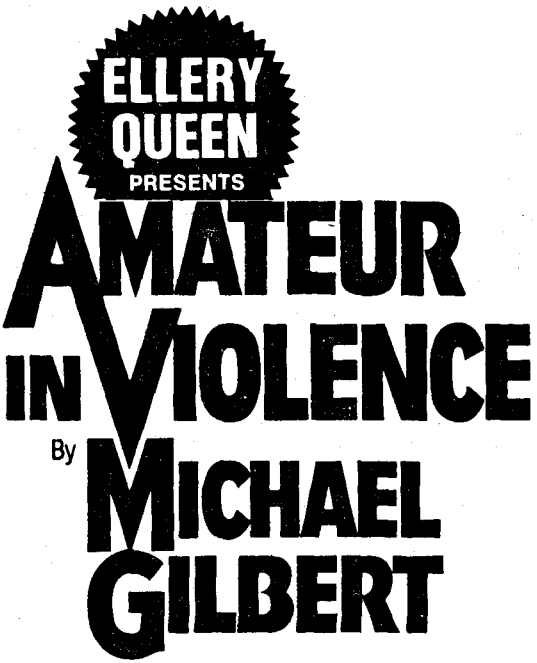

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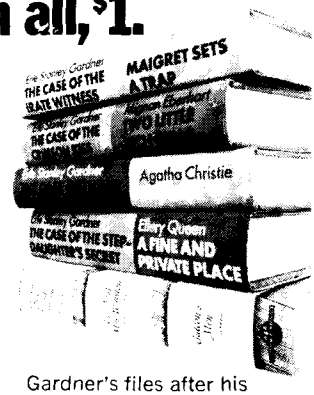
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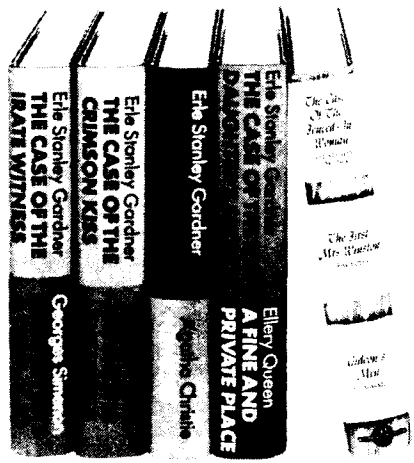
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